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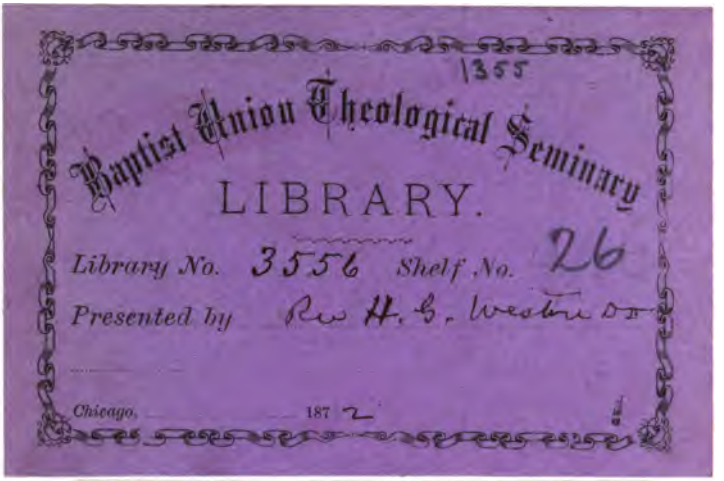

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BY WILLIAM JONES,

Author of the History of the Christian Church, Biblical Cyclopædia, &c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

CONTAINING:

I. DISCOURSES ON THE DIVINE AUTHORITY, &c. OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

II. OCCASIONAL DISCOURSES.

III. TRIP TO HOLYHEAD; &c. &c.

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DISCOURSE I.

THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE ASCERTAINED.

2 TIM. III. 16, 17.—*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*

IT is of the last importance to our receiving real profit from the Scriptures, that we are fully persuaded of their divine authority. This must strike every thoughtful person. Had we stood at the foot of Mount Sinai, when Moses descended from thence with the two tables of stone, *written on either side with the finger of God a*, how curious should we have been, persuaded of this extraordinary fact, to examine the words, the letters, and every circumstance about this venerable monument of divine workmanship! and, above all, how anxious rightly to understand and dutifully to receive the sentiments these records were intended to convey! Every the least degree of inattention and levity would have indicated want of sense as well as piety. The reasoning is exactly the same when applied to the whole Bible. A full persuasion therefore of its divine authority is of no small importance to a right treatment of it, and to our deriving that benefit from it which it was meant to afford.

Now it is a fact that some reject the Bible as an imposture. Since however it claims divine original, and not a few wise and good men have upon the maturest examination admitted the claim, it behoves such persons to consider the miserable risk they run, should it prove to be indeed the Word of God; and how deplorably their consciences will in the end reproach

a Exod. xxxi. 18. xxxii. 15, 16. xxxiv. 1, 28.

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them, should it be found that they have not impartially weighed this great question, but suffered their carnal prejudices to preclude inquiry.

There are others who do admit that the Scriptures contain a revelation from God. Their ideas, however, of divine inspiration are so general, indeterminate, and partial, that the Bible makes little impression on their minds: it produces scarce any other effect than that of a mere human composure. So much of its contents as agrees with their pre-conceived reasonings and views they admit: what is opposed thereto they reject. But if the Bible is no otherwise a divine revelation than all other books are which contain truth in them, and if men are at liberty to treat it in such manner as mere whim, conjecture, and prejudice may dictate, it cannot possibly answer the purpose which a revelation from God, if granted, must be designed to answer.

The Bible claims the authority of an infallible Test. *To the law and to the testimony*, says the prophet Isaiah, *if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them* a. *Search the Scriptures*, says our Saviour to the Jews—the Scriptures which were written by *holy men of God*, who *spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost* b. And in our text the apostle affirms, that *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God*. Now if this book be not received as a divine Test, its use, as we before observed, will be of little importance. But this is not all. To admit that some parts of it are a revelation from God, and at the same time to maintain that others are no more than the fallible, conjectural, reasonings of well-disposed men, is in effect to deprive the whole book of the authority of a divine revelation: so it must be, unless such a line is drawn as shall enable us to distinguish between the one and the other.

If indeed any part of Scripture can be proved to be spurious or an interpolation, let it be cashiered. If it cannot, we are not to be told, "This or that passage does not sound pleasingly in my ear, or is not perfectly agreeable with my creed, and therefore ought to be, and shall be rejected." Nor are we

a Isa. viii. 20. b John v. 39.—2 Pet. i. 20, 21.

to be told, in order to shake our faith in any particular doctrine of the Bible plainly laid down there, that "although such doctrine might be the opinion of the writer, it is to be presumed he was not divinely inspired in delivering it." Presumption here will not do: it must be proved that the writer hath positively declared, that in this instance he did not speak by divine inspiration.

Such proof I have a right to demand, and the rather, as we have a clear instance of an inspired writer's thus distinguishing between his own private opinion, and what he had in charge to deliver from God. The case I refer to is that of certain prudential advice which St. Paul gives the Corinthians, upon matters respecting marriage, which he thus guards, *I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.* And again, *The rest speak I, not the Lord a.* If then, in default of such positive proof, we are at liberty to give up any part of our Bible which does not meet our approbation, we are at liberty, if so disposed, to give up the whole. And thus the claim of Scripture to the authority of a divine Test will totally cease, till God is pleased to grant a new revelation, to inform us which part of our Bible is, and which not inspired.

But there is another class of people, and good people too, who push matters to such an extreme the other way, as to create doubts of the credibility of the Bible, which not knowing how to solve greatly perplex and disturb their minds. The works of God, as they come out of his hands, are all perfect. Hence they conclude, and very truly, that the Bible being written by God must be perfect; but consider not at the same time, that the perfection of Scripture consists purely in its perfect suitableness to the end for which it is given. It was not given to instruct us in questions of philosophy, oratory, music, or the like. If it were, any seeming disagreement in this book with the well-known and established principles of those or any other arts and sciences, might naturally create a doubt of its divine authority.

The sole intent of Scripture is to certify us of facts and doctrines that relate to religion and a future state, and to instruct

a 1 Cor. vii. 6, 12.

the most illiterate as well as the learned in these important matters. Which being the case, it is by no means strange that modes of speech common among mankind, and some of them not strictly, that is, philosophically, true, are frequently adopted; such as that the sun moves, that the earth hath corners, and that it stands upon pillars. Nor is it to be thought strange, that little or no attention is paid, at least in some parts of Scripture, to the beauties of oratory; and that the style of one book should differ from that of another, which books when compared are found in this particular to have less or more excellence. In a word, the grand object being attained, namely, that of ascertaining the essential facts and doc- of religion, it is not at all wonderful that a series of miracles should not be wrought, to preserve every manuscript from the trifling mistakes which it would be scarce possible for an infinite number of transcribers to avoid.

Now for want of duly considering these things, some pious people, when they meet with an expression in Scripture which seems scarce conformable to philosophical truth, or with language which strikes them as rather inelegant or improper, are instantly thrown into a fit of incredulity respecting the divine authority of the Bible.

Again, there is one other class of people, and these perhaps the most numerous, who profess to have no doubt of the authenticity of Scripture, but admit that from the beginning to the end it is the word of God, yet, alas! have little or no reverence for this sacred book. They seldom read it, or, if they do, run it over in the most desultory and careless manner. And so, not having God before their eyes, his word makes little impression on their hearts.

With a view therefore to the establishment and comfort of the real Christian, and the instruction and conviction of all, I propose to discourse at large on this very important subject of THE DIVINE AUTHORITY AND VARIOUS USE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. To which purpose I have chosen the words of the text, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man*

of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

The method I shall pursue in treating this fundamental article of our faith, shall be,

I. To explain the term *Scripture*—ascertain *what* is Scripture—and fix the *bounds* of Scripture.

II. Enquire what is the true and proper meaning of *Inspiration.*

III. Prove that the Scriptures are thus inspired.

IV. Consider their various and important Use, And,

V. Improve the subject.

I. We are to explain the term *Scripture*—ascertain *what* is Scripture—and fix the *bounds* of Scripture.

1. As to the term *Scripture.*

It signifies what is *written* by way of distinction from what is *spoken.* The utility of writing is very great. Words vanish into air. But *litera scripta,* as we say, *manet,* what is written abides. Writing was an early invention. But whether it was in use before the flood is uncertain. There was, however, no written revelation that we know of before the time of Moses. Nor should this seem strange, since there was no occasion for it. The antediluvians, and the generations immediately after the flood, lived to so great an age that the will of God revealed to Adam, Enoch, Noah, and others, was conveyed down to posterity with little or no danger of being adulterated. Tradition might then be as surely depended on as writing may now, there being persons alive of six, seven, or eight hundred years of age, who might be appealed to on all occasions respecting facts and doctrines said to have been declared and revealed by God. But about the time of Moses the age of man was reduced to nearly what it is now. And then, for this reason as well as many others, a written revelation became necessary. Accordingly God was pleased at that time to grant a written revelation.

Now this revelation, which gradually increased to its present state, is called *Scripture* by way of distinction from tradition; and the *Holy Scriptures* as coming from God. Not that the will of God was not, after Moses's time as well as before, in

some instances delivered to holy men without being committed to writing. For we may easily conceive it possible and probable, that extraordinary information might be communicated to individuals, to be published by them and to the people for present important purposes, which information was of no essential use and importance to posterity.

The Jews, who were a superstitious and bigotted people, failed not to abuse this idea to the most pernicious purposes. They pretend that the law delivered by Moses was of two kinds, the one *written* the other *oral*. And they tell us a story, the mere idle figment of their Rabbies, that the latter was delivered by Moses to Joshua and the seventy elders, and by them down from one generation to another, till about the middle of the second century of the Christian era. At which time this oral law of theirs was committed to writing, and collected into a book called the *Mishnah*; two comments upon which were afterwards written, the one called the Jerusalem, the other the Babylonish Talmud. And these books contain the whole of the Jewish religion as it is now professed by them.

But this *oral law* of the Jews is no part of Scripture in the sense of the text. This is evident beyond a doubt. For they themselves admit that it was not committed to writing till about the middle of the second century. And whereas their doctors in our Saviour's time availed themselves of it among the ignorant people, as a deposit committed to them to dispense as they pleased, our Lord often and in the strongest terms of disapprobation protested against it, charging them with *teaching for doctrines the commandments of men;—rejecting the commandment of God, that they might keep their own traditions;—and making the word of God of none effect through their traditions a.*—The Bible then is called *Scripture* by way of distinction from *tradition*, and *holy* to express its divine authority.—And this leads us,

2. To settle *what* is Scripture, which I think may be done with the clearest precision and certainty.

The question here is not whether Scripture is divinely in-

a Mark vii. 7, 9, 13.

spired. That will come to be considered hereafter. But, what was understood to be Scripture in our Saviour's time, and what has been universally received as such since that period? It is a question of fact to be determined by that kind of historical proof which all mankind are agreed in, and the rejection of which would totally destroy the credit of all past facts, and leave us in utter ignorance and uncertainty about every thing that hath happened before our time, and beyond the reach of our own senses.

(1.) We begin then with *the Old Testament*, to which the apostle chiefly refers in our text as, at the time this epistle was writ, the canon of the New Testament was not completed.

Now the history of *the Old Testament*, and of the collection of the several books of which it consists, is this. It begins with Genesis and closes with Malachi, which includes, I mean the time between the publication of the former and the latter, a space of above one thousand years! What care the Jews took of their law in the beginning is sufficiently known. It was laid up in the ark, and watched with a jealous eye. And, however, at the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar it was probably consumed and lost, yet it is evident that copies had been taken before that time of *the law* and *the prophets*, and that the Jews carried them with them to Babylon. Daniel had the holy Scriptures with him, for he quotes the law *a*, and speaks of the prophecies of Jeremiah *b*. And so had Ezra upon his return, for it is agreed on all hands that this last person was he who settled the canon of the Old Testament to his own time *c*.

Ezra was a Jewish priest, a wise, learned, and pious man. He corrected the errors that had crept into the copies of the holy Scriptures through the fault of transcribers. He disposed the books of which they consisted into their proper order. He added in several places, throughout the books of this edition, what appeared necessary for explaining and connect-

a Dan. ix. 11. *b* Dan. ix. 2.

c Whoever wishes to have more particular information on these matters, may consult the learned Dean Prideaux's *Connection of the History of the Old and New Testament.*

ing them. He changed the names of places that were grown obsolete, inserting in the room of them the new names by which they were at that time called. And he writ out the whole in the Chaldee character, which at the Babylonish captivity grew into use among the Jews. And in this laborious and important work he was assisted, as is I believe universally acknowledged, by the same Spirit that inspired the other penmen of the Old Testament scriptures.

The sacred books he divided into three parts—*The Law*—*The Prophets*—*The Hagiographa*, or holy writings. To this division our Lord is supposed to allude *a*, where he speaks of 'all things being fulfilled which were written in the Law, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms concerning him;' the word Psalms, with which the Hagiographa begins, standing for the whole of that division of Scripture, according to a known practice among the Jews.

This threefold division contained, according to Josephus *b*, an universally respected historian, *Twenty-two Books which were deservedly accounted divine* (τα δικαιως θεια πεπιστευμενα). *The Law* contained the five books of Moses, viz. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. *The Prophets* (that is, those prophets who flourished between the time of Moses and the reign of Artaxerxes the son of Xerxes king of Persia) contained thirteen books, viz. Joshua, Judges with Ruth, Samuel, Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah with Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, the twelve minor Prophets, Job, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. And *the Hagiographa* contained four books, viz. Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

The ancient and latter Jews agree in establishing the divine authority of these books. But they vary as to the order in which they place them. The particulars of these variations it is not necessary to mention, as they affect not the grand question. It must however be observed, that they bring the two books of Chronicles, and some of them the other books of the latest date, under the head of the *Hagiographa*. For the elucidating of which matter it will be proper to give you the

a Luke xxiv. 44.

b Joseph. Op. contra Apion. Lib. 1. Sect. 8. Edit. Hudson.

following observations of the learned Dr. Prideaux *a*. "All these books," says he, "were not received into the canon of the holy Scriptures in Ezra's time. For Malachi it is supposed lived after him, and in Nehemiah mention is made of Jaddua as high priest, and of Darius Codomannus as king of Persia, who were at least an hundred years after his time; and in the third chapter of the first book of Chronicles, the genealogy of the sons of Zerubbabel is carried down for so many generations, as must necessarily make it reach to the time of Alexander the Great; and therefore this book could not be put into the canon, till after his time. It is most likely, that the two books of Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, as well as Malachi, were afterwards added in the time of Simon the Just, and that it was not till then that the Jewish canon of the holy Scriptures was fully completed."

Upon the whole, it is clear that our Saviour acknowledged the divine authority of the Old Testament scriptures under the titles they then bare of *The Law*—*The Prophets*—and *The Psalms*, that is, as we have shewn, The Hagiographa. And it is further evident from the testimony of the ancient and later Jews, that these three divisions of the Old Testament scriptures included in them all those books which we now receive as divine *b*.

Having thus ascertained the scriptures of the Old Testament, we proceed,

(2.) To those of the *New Testament*.

a Prideaux's Connect. Vol. II. p. 477. Edit. 9th.

b The learned and accurate Mr. Jeremiah Jones, having occasion to advert to the canon of the Old Testament, thus expresses himself: "In short, "whatever almost can be objected against the authority of the present canon "of the Old Testament, either in behalf of any books which are not in it, or "against any that are, may easily be answered by this single consideration, "viz. *That we receive the same and no other books than what the Jewish Church "received in our Saviour's time*, as is evident from the copies the Christians "procured of them, and the catalogues they made of them (especially that of "*Melito Sardensis* *) soon after the destruction of Jerusalem †."

"* *Vid. Euseb. Histor. Eccles.* l. VI. c. 26. *There are others very early, "as Origine's in Psal. primo*," &c.

† *Jones's Canon*, Vol. I. p. 4.

The apostle, as I observed before, had his eye chiefly in the text to the scriptures of the Old Testament, for he had been speaking in the preceding verse of Timothy's having *from a child known the holy Scriptures.* And at the time this epistle was writ the canon of the New Testament was not closed. Yet it must be remembered that at this time, which was late in the apostle Paul's life, three of the gospels were written, and very probably collected together. There can therefore be no impropriety in considering the word Scripture in reference to the New Testament. Be that however as it may, since the canon of the New Testament is now closed, the enquiry respecting the several parts of it is important to us.

Now the books of the New Testament, as they stand in our Bibles, consist of the *four Gospels*, the *Acts of the Apostles*, the *Epistles of St. Paul*, the *Epistle to the Hebrews*, the *seven Catholic* or *General Epistles*, and the *Revelation of John.* It is not certain at what exact time these books of the New Testament were collected into one volume. But it is, I believe, generally agreed, that the four Gospels were collected in the time of the apostle John, and that the three first received his approbation. This is attested by Eusebius the ecclesiastic historian, who flourished in the beginning of the fourth century. Before the middle of the second century the greatest part of the books of the New Testament were read in every Christian society throughout the world, and received as a divine rule of faith and manners. And as to the Revelation of John, which he received towards the close of his life, and which therefore could not be circulated so early as the other books, it was admitted into the canon of Scripture upon the fullest and clearest proof of its authenticity.

In short the existence of all the sacred books of the New Testament is abundantly attested by the primitive Fathers, such as Clemens Romanus, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, Theophilus Antiochenus, Clemens Alexandrinus, Tertullian, Origen, Eusebius, &c. Some of whom give exact catalogues of these books, as acknowledged by the Christians to be genuine, and every where read by them in their churches. It is also to be remembered, that these books were very early trans-

lated into many languages, and quoted both by friends and enemies, which clearly proved their existence, as well as secured them from being corrupted.—Thus we have shewn, by clear historical evidence, what are the books of which the Old and New Testaments consist.—And so we are led to the

3. And last question, How we are to fix the bounds of Scripture?—*All Scripture*, says the apostle; plainly declaring that the books which came not within this description, whatever might be their pretensions, were not given by Inspiration.

Now as to the Old Testament, the Apocryphal books, which are bound up with some of our Bibles, are by most Protestants upon very good authority considered as uncanonical. Indeed as to some of them there is abundant internal evidence of their spuriousness. Yet the church of Rome, as appears from the Council of Trent, has adopted them, and placed them on a footing with the Scriptures; herein acting like the Jews, who added their oral law, and traditions of the elders, to Moses and the Prophets. Indeed the Apocryphal writings were most, I might perhaps say, every one of them written after the time the canon of the Old Testament was closed, and so not acknowledged by the Jews as a part of it, nor to be found in the Hebrew and Chaldee copies of the Bible. And our Lord and his apostles having borne no testimony to their divine authority, which they have expressly done to the Old Testament, is a further confirming proof that they ought to be treated as apocryphal.

Here I think it right to observe, that it is a considerable presumptive evidence of the authenticity of the Song of Solomon, that our Lord, who was used to protest against the errors of the Jews, and their making the word of God of no effect by their traditions, has no where cautioned his disciples against receiving this book as a part of Scripture, though it appears to have been acknowledged by the Jews, as we have already shewn, it being a part of the *Hagiographa* or sacred writings.

It must also be further observed here, that the translation of the Old Testament scriptures by the Septuagint into the

Greek language, for the use of the Hellenistic Jews, (which translation was quoted by Christ and his apostles) proved no doubt a considerable fence against every attempt, if such an one had been made, to interpolate or corrupt that part of our Bible.—And thus you have seen not only of what books the Old Testament consists, but how they have been secured by divine Providence from any addition of mere human productions.

We come now to the New Testament, and here put the same question we did respecting the Old; How do we know that the books enumerated are the only ones belonging to the sacred canon? The answer will I am persuaded be perfectly satisfactory.

There were in the early ages of Christianity, as we learn from history, many pieces spread abroad under the titles of *The Acts of Paul and Thecla, The Gospels of Mary, Thomas, Nicodemus, of Christ's Infancy*, and a prodigious number besides; some of which reported the most extravagant things which no sober man could believe, and others seem to have been the productions of well-meaning but weak people. These spurious histories may very justly be considered as the efforts of Satan, to prejudice the minds of the people against the genuine gospels of the evangelists. But divine Providence counteracted these artifices of the great adversary, and made them turn to the service instead of the obstruction of Christianity. Some of these books were of very early date, and their manifest ill-tendency made it necessary, even in the time of the apostles, to collect, as you have heard, the true gospels. It put the churches every where upon their guard against these insidious and dangerous attempts. It stirred up a spirit of enquiry, and induced in thoughtful people a sort of incredulity which was of service to the cause of truth. It made them the more careful in the business of transcribing the Scriptures, and faithfully translating them into other languages.

Nor was it difficult to pronounce upon the numerous productions of this sort, whether they were or were not spurious. For surely it required little sagacity to discern, that a book

which contained absolute falsehoods, which contradicted itself, which erred in regard of dates, and many other historical circumstances, or which reported tales that if true were trifling and uninteresting; I say it required little sagacity to convince a plain honest man, that such a book could not come from God. These and the like rules of interpretation were so level to the meanest understanding, that we may easily conceive how the truth would triumph over error, and how sincere Christians would be enabled to draw a clear and decisive line between what was and what was not Scripture *a*.

And then it is further to be observed, that respectable writers of the second and third centuries assure us, that the churches were unanimous in the sentence they pronounced respecting the apostolic writings; and we have catalogues given us by the Fathers, situated at remote distances from each other, and some of them flourishing in one century and some of them in another, of the full complement of the books of the New Testament. To all which it must be added, that the translation of the New Testament into various languages, proved a further security against all attempts to interpolate and corrupt it, and to fix the idea of the canon of Scripture being closed with The Revelation of John. And no doubt the solemn sentence denounced by that apostle upon those who should add to the word of God or detract from it, (however it might have more immediate respect to that book) failed not to operate as a guard to all the other books of the New Testament.

Thus have we gone through our first head of discourse. We have explained the term *Scripture*—settled *what* is Scripture, or the parts of which it consists—and fixed the *bounds* of Scripture—enquiries to which the language of the text, *all Scripture*, hath naturally led us. And now we should proceed to enquire, What is the true and proper meaning of *Inspiration?* But this with what follows must be referred to another opportunity.

a The Rev. and learned Jeremiah Jones has largely and accurately discussed this argument in his *New and Full Method of settling the canonical Authority of the New Testament:* which excellent Treatise we before referred to.

Let us close with a few reflections. And,

(1.) From the view we have taken of the Scriptures, even before we come to consider the proof of their being divinely inspired, we derive a strong presumptive evidence of their truth.

They comprehend a large compass of time, no less than fifteen hundred years. They begin with Moses, and close with John, near one hundred years from the birth of Christ. They were written by a great variety of persons of different ranks and stations in life, of different natural capacities and talents, and of different education and acquired advantages; some legislators, some reformers, some kings, some priests, some prophets, and some men of learning, such as Luke and Paul, and some plain humble fishermen, such as Peter, James, and John. These all agree in one grand design of advancing the glory of God and promoting the good of men. Their doctrines, predictions, histories, precepts, and characters for probity, holiness, and benevolence, all agree.—What a wonderful book this! Is there any thing like it to be found any where in our world? Sure there is the strongest presumptive reason to conclude from this general view of it, before we examine the positive evidence, that it must be divine.

(2.) What consideration then can possibly excuse any man, who is capable of reading it or of having it read to him, from diligently attending to it?

Do I speak to any here of this description? Let me address you, Sirs, with all possible seriousness and plainness. Your conduct, be your motive what it may, is indefensible upon every ground of prudence and common sense. Curiosity, a wish to escape danger, and a desire of happiness, are passions deeply implanted in our nature. Who is not struck with appearances out of the ordinary course of things? Who is not disposed to listen to a story that is strange and marvellous, if it be not absolutely incredible? Here is a book said to be written by the finger of God. It has been believed to be such by men whose superior understanding and extensive learning are acknowledged by all the world. We do not wish you to believe it upon their testimony. But surely their testimony may

be urged as a reason to dispose you to enquire into the matter. A Bacon, a Newton, and a Locke, are characters of distinguished eminence. Did they receive this book? And can you think it beneath you to listen to the arguments that convinced them of its authenticity? Have you no curiosity to gratify? Shall every new discovery in science, politics, and commerce engage your attention; and this great question be treated as unworthy your notice? What is such conduct but an argument of stupidity and want of sense? Would Pagans, in the situation you are, have acted your part?

But this is not all. Let me beseech you to consider the hazard you run by thrusting this book from you without examining its contents. Should it in the end prove to be an inspired book, and you cannot say that this is impossible, the consequence must be to you most tremendous. If God has been pleased to signify his will to men by a written revelation, and taken care to authenticate it by sufficient evidence, surely he must be displeased with those who will not so much as give him a hearing. The curses pronounced in this book upon men of this description are most alarming. And upon a supposition of its truth and the competence of the evidence, it cannot be said they are inequitable and cruel. *Refuse not* then, *him who speaketh. If they escaped not who refused him who spake on earth*, that is, Moses; *much more shall not we escape if we turn away from him who speaketh from heaven a*, that is, Christ.

Nor are these the only considerations I would use to urge you to enquiry. If God deigns to converse with men by an extraordinary revelation, and in a manner so mild and gentle, and so admirably adapted to their construction as reasonable creatures, it may be presumed that his intention is merciful and good. This appears upon the face of the book. It is given us to make us wise unto salvation. It opens scenes to our view the most enlivening and joyful. If it denounces wrath on the impenitent and obstinate, it promises also peace and happiness to the penitent and believing. And are there no charms in peace and happiness, in the favour of God, the

a Heb. xii. 25.

comforts of religion, victory over death, and the unutterable joys of a future world, to excite your attention, and stimulate you to serious consideration and enquiry? But I forbear.—Once more,

(8.) How thankful, Christians, should we be to God for this book!

I speak to those who have read it, examined it with attention, received it upon a clear conviction of its truth, entered into the spirit of it, and been made wiser, better, and happier by its instructions. To the grace of God you owe the warmest tribute of gratitude. Thank God that your lot is cast under the most perfect dispensation of religion, and in a country where civil and religious liberty is so happily enjoyed. Thank God that you have opportunity of reading this book, and of hearing its doctrines explained and proved, and its duties illustrated and enforced. And, above all, be thankful to him for divine illumination and assistance. Let us improve these advantages by frequent meditation and fervent prayer. Let the same mind be in us as was in Christ Jesus. Let candour and benevolence be the prominent features in our countenances. And let probity and holiness mark the actions of our lives. In fine, let us do our utmost to spread the knowledge and favour of divine truth, rejoicing in hope of that glorious day, when *the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea a.*

a Isa. xi. 9.

DISCOURSE II.

THE NATURE OF DIVINE INSPIRATION CONSIDERED.

2 TIM. III. 16, 17.—*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.*

IN the present state of mankind, encompassed as we are with ignorance, temptation, and sin, a written revelation from God is most desirable. That God should communicate his will to us in this way is not impossible; and all things considered, I may venture to add, it is by no means improbable. A book is put into our hands claiming this character, I mean the Bible. Many wise and good men have admitted the claim to be well-founded. And it is clear, there is no book we know of in the world that has any thing like the same pretensions to divine authority. Neither the Zend of Zoroaster, the Five Books of Confucius, nor the Koran of Mohammed, are to be put in competition with it. No consideration therefore can possibly excuse our diligently enquiring into the merits of this great question, Whether the Bible be really the word of God? It is in the highest degree important: our present comfort and usefulness, and our future and everlasting welfare depends upon it.

Now to place this subject in its true light, and to assist our enquiries upon it, I have proposed to discourse at large on the words just read. And the method I have laid down in treating the text is—To explain the term *Scripture*, and fix the bounds of it—*all* Scripture—To enquire what is the true and proper meaning of *divine inspiration*—To prove that the Scriptures are thus inspired—To consider their *Use* as signified in the text—And then to improve the subject.

The first of these heads was the subject of the former discourse. Here we, first, explained the term Scripture, and shewed you that it is so called by way of distinction from tradition; and Holy Scripture to express its divine authority. We proceeded, secondly, to settle what is Scripture, that is, what was understood to be such in our Saviour's time, and what has been universally received as such since that period. This is a question of fact to be determined by historical proof, the rejection of which kind of evidence would leave us in absolute uncertainty about all past facts, and every thing beyond the reach of the senses. And upon a particular examination of the proofs adduced, the books of the Old and New Testaments as they stand in our Bibles have been found to be Scripture. This has led us, thirdly, to fix the *bounds* of Scripture, and to shew that what does not come within this description, was not given by inspiration: which we have been enabled to do by a brief detail of facts, and by the mention of a few canons or rules of judging between genuine and apocryphal writings, which are obvious to every one's understanding. And now, having fixed the fact respecting the phrase *All Scripture*, we proceed to our second head of discourse, which is,

II. To enquire what is the true and proper meaning of *divine Inspiration.*

By *divine inspiration* I mean "A supernatural influence exerted over the mind, whereby its faculties are instantaneously improved to a degree which they could not have acquired by the mere unassisted powers of nature."

Thus, for instance, were a plain illiterate man on a sudden to speak all languages, we should conclude he was inspired. The like we should suppose of him who gave us a clear, accurate, circumstantial account of a prodigious variety of facts and discourses, not committed to writing for some years after they had happened. The same claim that man would justly have to inspiration, who should bring forward to our view doctrines or mysteries, the most sublime, interesting, and important, absolutely beyond the reach of human ken and penetration, and in language clear and unequivocal, and at the same time

divinely grand and elevated. He, in a word, would be thought to be inspired who should certainly foretel future events, that depend upon various contingencies, and which can no ways be guessed at by the utmost stretch of human prudence and sagacity. In these instances the interference of a divine influence is most certain, because the facts are to be accounted for in no other way. Every effect must have a cause. But these effects, if not attributed to divine interposition, have no assignable cause whatever. It is therefore a violation of the dictates of common sense to deny such persons to be divinely inspired.

To question the possibility of God's having access to the human mind, assisting its faculties, and communicating to it by immediate revelation a clear compendious view of his will, is most absurd. What! Shall he who made the world, and whose energy through the material part of the creation is perceived and felt by all, be shut out from the mind of man? Shall this temple, whose curious mechanism furnishes the most striking proof of the skill of the divine architect, be inaccessible to its Creator? Shall the mighty power of God pervade each blade of grass, cause it to spring up, expand, and grow; and shall the soul of man be independent of Deity? Are its powers, once formed, so perfect as to need no further support or assistance? Or are they raised to such a state of pre-eminence in the creation as to be no more subject to any external check or control? It cannot be. To suppose it is contrary to all analogy of reasoning. Yea more than this, it is to deny the obvious intent of the blessed God in creating the soul, which was by conversing with it to make it holy and happy, and by his dominion over it to bring about the purposes of his universal moral government.

But the question now before us is, How this influence is exerted over the mind in the business of inspiration? Now it is acknowledged we are utterly incompetent to the giving a clear physical account of this matter. All attempts accurately to explain the influence itself, the manner of its operation, its degree, limits, and extent, must in the nature of the thing be attended with uncertainty.

This is further evident from the figurative mode of expression used in Scripture relative to the question under consideration. The same word, in the Greek language, which is used for the *wind*, πνευμα, is used also for the *soul*; and is with the attribute *holy* applied to God—*the Holy Spirit*. And that influence exerted over the soul of which we are here speaking, is expressed in the text by the same term as is used in respect of the wind, namely, *inspiration a*. So Elihu says in his discourse with Job, *there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding b*. And it is remarkable, when our Saviour shewed himself to his disciples after his resurrection, it is said, *He breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost c*, or Spirit. There is therefore no doubt some analogy between the operations of the wind and of the soul, and between the divine influence on the former and on the latter. This observation is authorized by what our Lord says in his discourse with Nicodemus. And if I mention here two or three of the most striking circumstances in the comparison, it may be of some use to the subject before us.

The wind is a *mysterious* element, its operation is *various*, and the effects it produces are *real* and *important*. All which is true of the influence which God is pleased to exert on the minds of men. It is true, as our Saviour affirms, in regard of that moral change which passes on the heart of a sinner at his conversion to God, *The wind bloweth where*

a Θεοπνευστος, *divinely inspired*, or *breathed*.——It may not be improper to observe here that some have thought the words Πασα γραφη, Θεοπνευστος, και ωφελιμος, &c. should be rendered thus, *The whole divinely inspired Scripture is profitable*, &c. But the remark of Wolfius on the construction of this passage, in his *Curæ Philologicæ*, clearly shews that our translation of it is better and more literal—"vox Θεοπνευστος æque ac ωφελιμος, subintellecto εστι, ad γραφη instar predicati referri debet, ut non solum *utilitas* sed et *divina* ejus *origo* innuatur. Alioquin enim τε και locum habere non posset, sed scribendum fuisset: πασα γραφη Θεοπνευστος ωφελιμος εστι."

b Job xxxii. 8. The original word rendered *Spirit*, signifies also *Wind*. And the word rendered *Inspiration*, signifies *Breath*. So Gen. ii. 7. 'The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils *the breath* of life.' So Job xxxvii. 10. 'By *the breath* of God frost is given.'

c John xxii. 22.

it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit a. The mind is enlightened, and the will and affections are renewed. Facts these, real and important, and imputed, you see, to a divine influence or energy, operating in some more powerfully and instantaneously than in others; but an influence which, in its origin, procedure, and operation, is secret and mysterious. "Like the wind, thou hearest the sound of it, feelest and enjoyest the effects of it, but knowest not, so as accurately to describe it, whence it comes or whither it goes."

The like is to be observed, in a degree, and in some of the particulars just mentioned, of that influence by which men are sometimes held back from bad and impelled to good actions, even though their hearts still remain under the dominion of sin. How have their purposes in some remarkable instances been changed, and their exertions controlled, in a manner as strange to themselves as to all around them! God would not suffer Laban to hurt Jacob *b*, or Balaam to curse Israel *c*. *The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will d. He withdraweth man from his purpose e.* And he sometimes *disappointeth the devices of the crafty*, by so weakening *their hands that they cannot perform their enterprise f.*

But these qualities of mysteriousness, variety, and energy, are more especially applicable to the point of *divine inspiration.* Here the divine influence is to be considered as exerted chiefly, if not wholly, on the intellectual powers of the soul. But the manner in which it was exerted on the mind, is a question of which we can give little or no account. Some light however is thrown upon it in Scripture, which we shall have occasion to advert to hereafter, and from whence it should seem that some were affected in a more sensible and striking manner than others. But it is of the figurative language of the text we are now speaking. And in conformity to that it is natural to observe, that as the wind sometimes blows ra-

a John iii. 8. *b* Gen. xxxi. 7. *c* Num. xxii. 12.
d Prov. xxi. 1. *e* Job xxxiii. 17. *f* Job v. 13.

pidly and at other times flows in soft and gentle gales, so inspired men were differently agitated on different occasions. *Holy men spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost a*—moved sometimes in a soft and gentle, and sometimes in a more powerful and energetic, but always in a perceptible, manner. What those τεκμηρια or *infallible tokens* were by which they knew themselves to be inspired of God, it is not for us to say: but we may be sure they were such as left them without a doubt that they were not imposed upon.

As to the apostles on the day of Pentecost, if any thing is to be gathered from the attendant external circumstances of their inspiration at that time, it looks as if the impulse they were then under was more extraordinary than at some other seasons. *Suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting b.* And again a few days after, when they returned to their company, having been examined by the rulers and elders of the Jews, it is said, *When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness c.* Be the question however as it may respecting the mode of inspiration, it is certain the effects were, like those of the wind, real, interesting and important. Upon the whole, it appears from the metaphorical language of the text, that the divine operation in the matter of which we are here discoursing, is very mysterious, and that therefore we ought to be very modest in our inquiries about it.

Let us now proceed to a more particular investigation of our subject. And here I propose to consider *divine inspiration* in three points of view, each clearly distinguishable from the other, and each sufficiently warranted, I think, by Scripture *d*. There is an inspiration of *Superintendency*—of *Elevation*—and of *Suggestion*. These three kinds of inspiration we shall endeavour to explain, and consider them, as we pass

a 2 Pet. i. 21. *b* Acts ii. 2. *c* Acts iv. 31.

d For this mode of treating the subject, with some variation, I am indebted to Dr. Doddridge's excellent "Dissertation on the Inspiration of the New Testament," in his *Family Expositor*.

on, in reference to *historical facts*, *doctrinal truths*, and *future events*.

1. By inspiration of *Superintendency* I mean a controlling influence exerted over the mind, whereby it is infallibly secured from error.

The use and importance of this kind of inspiration in regard of *historical facts*, of which we mean here principally to speak, is very great. If a series of miraculous events, on which the glorious superstructure of the gospel was to be raised, did take place, with little interruption, from the beginning of time to the period of our Saviour's erecting his kingdom on earth, it was fit, it was necessary that they should be recorded, and recorded with the exactest truth and accuracy. There must not be any the least departure from the rule of rectitude. The testimony of God must be conveyed down to mankind in its purest state, without any adulteration or false colouring. And indeed all other historical facts, whether relative to the manner in which the divine laws, covenants, and promises were delivered; or to the characters, lives, and actions of men who were to become examples to us, must, if they answer the ends of their publication, be so transmitted to us as that they may be surely depended upon. The importance of this must strike every one at first view.

Now it was impossible that these facts should be delivered to us in the manner they are, without the several historians being divinely instructed respecting such as happened before their time, and without their memory being extraordinarily assisted respecting those within their own time. For supposing them, as in the case of the evangelists, to have been eye-witnesses of the events they report, it nevertheless would have been strange to the last degree, considering the number and variety of the facts and circumstances attending them, the length of many of our Saviour's discourses, the time that elapsed before they were committed to writing, the fallibility of the memory, the different impressions which things usually make on the minds of spectators, and many other unavoidable occasions of inaccuracy and mistake; I say, considering all these things, it would have been strange indeed if left to them-

selves they should have given us so clear, particular, and perfectly consistent a detail of them as they have done. In this case it would have been little less than a miracle. Their memory must therefore have been extraordinarily assisted.

Now this is the kind of *inspiration* of which we are here speaking. The Holy Spirit kept a watch over them as they wrote, guarded them against the illusions of a warm and eccentric imagination, enabled them to state facts truly, to relate the circumstances of them accurately, and to range them in an orderly and consistent manner. To this purpose our Lord speaks when he promises his disciples, that *the Holy Ghost should bring all things to their remembrance a.* And here it should be observed, that this kind of inspiration did by no means preclude the natural and regular use of their own proper memory. The facts reported, of which they had been eye-witnesses, rose to their view in the manner they had beheld them, and struck them, it is probable, with the same sensations they felt at the time they happened.

Nor was it necessary to their being thus inspired that they should not be at liberty to use their own words, or to write in that style which was natural to them *b.* This I mention because it is evident that the inspired writers, particularly the evangelists, do differ in their style from each other. And it is also evident that in the writings of John there is a manifest sameness of style in his Gospel, Epistles, and Book of Revelation. Which may also be observed of the writings of Luke and Paul.

But the objection grounded on this circumstance to the inspiration of Scripture is utterly inconclusive. As will appear

a John xiv. 26.

b "We grant," says Dr. Owen, "that they used their own *abilities of mind* and understanding in the choice of words and expressions. So the *Preacher* sought to find out *acceptable words*, Eccl. xii. 10. But the Holy Spirit, who is more intimate into the minds and skill of men than they are themselves, did so guide and operate in them, as that the words they fixed upon were as directly and certainly from him, as if they had been spoken to them by an audible voice."—*Owen on the Spirit*, Book II. Ch. I. Sect. 20.

if it be considered first of all, that in relating historical events the main business is, the stating them truly and accurately. To which purpose it is not necessary that other words should be dictated to the writer than he is accustomed to use, or that the natural and usual turn of his periods and phraseology should be overruled. It is enough that we are assured, by divine authority, that the facts which the evangelists relate are in every particular true, and may most surely be depended upon.

It is further to be considered, that this variety of style observable in their writings, is so far from being an evidence that they were not inspired, in the sense we here understand the term *inspiration*, that it hath quite the contrary effect. For it seems to have been wisely so ordered by God that they should use their own words, to render the veracity and agreement of the several writers the more conspicuous. And after all, whatever difference there may be in their style, even admitting that there is more ease and elegance in one than in another, yet that which each uses is the fittest and best adapted to the purpose which infinite Wisdom proposed.

Hitherto we have considered this inspiration of *Superintendency* in reference to the historical part of Scripture, to which indeed it principally belongs. But it should be added, before we pass on, that this kind of influence was likewise exerted over the minds of the inspired writers in regard of every other part of Scripture, so that they were infallibly secured from uttering any thing that was not conformable to truth. Had any passion, predilection, or mistaken zeal tempted them to mingle their own doubtful reasonings or fond conceits with the doctrines, precepts, promises, and predictions they had in charge to deliver, this controlling influence would have held them back from the attempt. And indeed instances might be mentioned of some bad men who were divinely inspired, and who would have perverted the message they received from God, had they not by this influence been forcibly hindered from so doing. This was remarkable in the case of Balaam: *The word that I shall speak unto thee*, says the Lord, *that thou shalt speak*. And he himself says to Balak, *All that the*

Lord speaketh, that I must do a.—But it is time we now proceed,

2. To the kind of inspiration we mentioned, I mean that of *Elevation.*

This chiefly respects *doctrinal truths*, as the former does historical facts. Now it must strike every one, that in a book said to come from God it is natural to expect, that *Perspicuity* and *Sublimity* should mark the discoveries therein made of his will.

As to the former, *perspicuity;* the commands, promises, and threatnings of God's word, together with the many practical invitations, expostulations, and reasonings of it, are so clear and plain that he who runs may read; and the wayfaring man though a fool, has no cause to complain that occasion is given him to err, or that the trumpet gives an uncertain sound. But then the nature of some subjects, such as the mode of the divine subsistence, the administration of the supreme government, the operation of the Holy Spirit on intelligent minds, and the glories of a future world; the nature, I say, of these subjects is such that, considering the weakness of our faculties, they must necessarily be involved in more or less obscurity. Yet what we are required to believe respecting them is expressed in language clear and perspicuous. And here the influence of infallible *inspiration* is to be observed directing the writers of the Bible to such plain and unequivocal terms as best answer the purpose.

But what I have principally in view under this head, is *sublimity*—for which reason we call this kind of inspiration, *Inspiration of Elevation.* Now it is natural to expect that the writers of the Bible, in the devotional parts of it especially, should speak of God, of Christ, of the mystery of redemption, of a future world, and of the closing scenes of this, in exalted and sometimes rapturous and ecstatic language. Accordingly such language frequently occurs, in the book of Job, the Psalms, Isaiah, and the writings of the apostle Paul. Specimens might be produced the most noble that ever entered the ears or conceptions of mortal man. Two or three on

a Num. xxii. 35. xxiii. 26.

the first of these subjects, the Majesty of God, it may not be improper to mention.

How sublime the prophet Isaiah's description of the God of Israel, when opposing the divine character to that of Pagan deities!—'Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand? And meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?—Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt-offering. All nations before him are as nothing, and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity.—He sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; he stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in; he bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity.—To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy one *a*.'

Who can hear the psalmist celebrating the praises of Jehovah, his Almighty deliverer, without acknowledging his language, as well as his devotion, to have been divinely inspired?—'The sorrows of death compassed me, and the floods of ungodly men made me afraid. The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God: he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because he was wroth. There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. He bowed the heavens also and came down: and darkness was under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place: his pavilion round about him were dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before him his thick clouds passed, hail-stones and coals

a Isa. xl. 12, 15—17, 22, 23, 25.

of fire. The Lord thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave his voice; hailstones and coals of fire. Yea, he sent out his arrows, and scattered them; and he shot out lightenings, and discomfited them. Then the channels of waters were seen, and the foundations of the world were discovered: at thy rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of thy nostrils. He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of many waters *a*.'—

To these passages let me add the prayer of the prophet Habakkuk *b*.—'O Lord, I have heard thy speech and was afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy. God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light, he had horns coming out of his hand, and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations, and the

a Psal. xviii. 4—16. If this Psalm is to be considered as *the Song* of Messiah, the Son of David, *in the day* (as the title expresses it) when *the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Death* or *the Grave*, as Mr. Pearce conjectures it should be, instead of *Saul*; if, I say, this interpretation is admitted, the scene here described gives us a most sublime idea of the triumphs of our great Emmanuel over death and the powers of darkness. The psalmist elsewhere speaking of what followed his resurrection, says—*The chariots of God* were *twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord* was *among them as in Sinai, in the holy place.* Then *did he ascend on high*, he *led captivity captive*; he *received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them*, Psal. lxviii. 17, 18. And now we are speaking of the victories of our Almighty Saviour, I cannot forbear adding that striking passage of the prophet Isaiah, lxiii. 1—4. 'Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the wine-fat? I have trodden the wine-press alone, and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury, and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in my heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.'

b Chap. iii. 2—13.

everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the Lord displeased against the rivers? Was thine anger against the rivers? Was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses, and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lift up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed,'——.

Now the question is, How are we to conceive of the influence of divine *inspiration* in respect of these wonderful productions? Three things seem to have been necessary to these productions. First, the presenting to the intellect of the inspired author the subject treated of in a clear, bright, grand, magnificent point of view. The kindling in his breast, secondly, a flame of pure devotion. And then, thirdly, assisting him with a kind of language suited to the dignity and importance of the subject.

It is not perhaps easy in treating of this matter to describe the exact boundaries between nature and an extraordinary divine agency. There is a manifest difference between the intellectual powers of one man and another. Some possess a wonderful descriptive genius. They have an imagination, vivid like the fire, and rapid like the wind. Objects strike them after a manner almost peculiar to themselves. An Homer and a Milton cannot be read without wonder. And the powers with which these men were endowed no doubt came from him who *worketh all and in all a.* And I do not know why we may not admit that all by whose instructions mankind

a 1 Cor. xii. 9.

have been greatly enlightened and benefited, were extraordinarily assisted by God. "But it does not appear," as a learned and pious writer on this subject observes *a*, "that the design of Providence by such elevation of sentiment, style, and manner, was to bear testimony to the person adorned with them as a messenger sent to speak in his name. For this is as effectually to be done in the plainest forms of expression."

But, with respect to the writers of the Bible, they were, as we shall hereafter largely prove, *moved by the Holy Ghost*. And all we can say upon the question, In what manner they were moved by the Holy Ghost? is, that the types or images of heavenly things were held up clearly to their view; that those divine affections which had been implanted in their breasts, were enlivened and inflamed to an unusual degree; and that so by the guidance and energy of the Holy Spirit they spake and writ in the sublime manner the Scriptures relate. And special care was taken, by that superintending influence of which we spoke before, that not a tittle should escape them that bordered on untruth or exaggeration, or that was not perfectly agreeable to the mind and will of God. Thus Isaiah writ, thus the apostle Paul writ. And it is scarce possible methinks to read some portions especially of their writings, without observing in their style and manner the evident signatures of celestial inspiration. They seem to have been carried above themselves, and hardly to have known while they spoke whether they were in or out of the body.—So much may suffice then for the second species of *inspiration*. The last and most perfect of all remains to be discoursed of, and that is,

3. Inspiration of *Suggestion*.

In this case, it should seem that the use of the faculties is superseded. God speaks directly to the mind, and the inspired writer is literally speaking his amanuensis. He not only makes discoveries to the understanding which could be acquired no other way, but dictates the very words. He suggests the ideas, reasonings, and language.

This sort of *inspiration* is applicable to a great part of the

a Dr. Doddridge.

Bible. The ten commandments were not only spoken by God himself from the mount, but written by his finger on the tables of stone, and from thence transcribed into the Pentateuch. Many of the discourses of God to Moses and the Israelites reported in those books, seem to be of this description. As were also many of the messages sent by the prophets to the Jews and other nations, and which are strikingly prefaced with the emphatic phrase of *Thus saith the Lord.* The words of David to Solomon, when he gave him a pattern of the temple he was to build, are remarkable. *All this,* said he, *the Lord made me to understand in writing by his hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern a.*

In the New Testament we have the very words which our Lord spake on many occasions, his sermon on the mount, his parables, and his discourses with the Jews and his disciples both before and after his resurrection. The seven epistles to the seven churches of Asia were dictated by him to the apostle John verbatim. And the apostle Paul speaks of *his having received of him* what he delivered to the Corinthians, respecting the institution of the Lord's Supper *b.* And there can be no doubt, as there are many mysteries revealed in the Bible not discoverable by the light of nature and reason, and many prophecies of future events that have been fulfilled, and others that are now fulfilling; there can be no doubt, I say, that these were delivered to the inspired penmen by *suggestion.*

In these instances we are to consider the writers of the Bible, not merely as assisted in their reasonings about what was generally intimated to them, but as receiving by immediate and express declaration from the Holy Spirit what they were to communicate to us. But though this mode of *inspiration* is not applicable to every part of Scripture, yet there is none of it but is in a sense inspired, and may be brought under one or other, or both of the former heads. So that we may depend upon the truth of every matter reported in our Bibles.—And this leads us to our third head of discourse, which is,

a 1 Chron. xxviii. 19. *b* 1 Cor. xi. 23.

III. To prove that the Scriptures of the *Old* and *New Testament* are thus inspired. And in the prosecution of this important question many things will occur, which will throw further light upon what has been said concerning the nature and mode of *divine inspiration*. At present we shall content ourselves with a few reflections on what you have heard. And,

(1.) The account we have given of *inspiration* clearly shews, that their objections who treat this whole business as mere enthusiasm, are totally groundless.

Will infidels dare affirm that God cannot reveal his will to men in the manner we have stated? What! Has he who made the intellectual spirit no mode of access to it? Is it unworthy of him to enlighten the human understanding? Having formed a gracious design of making us happy in the world to come, is it beneath him to point out the way to it? Having raised up men of approved integrity to communicate his will to us, is there any thing irrational in the method he has taken to communicate his will to them? What! Cannot he exercise a *superintending* control over the mind, so as to secure fallible men from erring, in a matter of such infinite importance as instructing us how to escape the just demerit of our guilt, and how to attain to eternal life? Cannot he assist their memory in reporting facts which lay the foundation of our hope? Cannot he who made the sun to warm and irradiate this material world, and who lighted up reason in the human breast, that candle of the Lord which folly and sin had nearly extinguished; cannot he so enlighten the minds of men, so strengthen their faculties, and so influence and *elevate* their hearts with divine truth, as to qualify them to become the infallible instructors of others? What is there unreasonable in his *suggesting* to their minds what they should commit to writing for the information of mankind, in points of the greatest acknowledged importance, to be transmitted to the latest posterity? Is all this enthusiasm? God forbid! How strange a part then are they acting who thus treat the doctrine of *divine inspiration!* Should it be found another day, that through inveterate prejudice, and a criminal

attachment to worldly pleasures, they have stifled the dictates of reason and conscience, and done despite to the Spirit of grace, how deplorable will their condition be!

(2.) The view we have taken of this important subject furnishes us with a ready reply to the little trifling objections of minute philosophers to the divine authority of Scripture.

The objections I refer to are such as arise from difference of style, and other seeming imperfections and inaccuracies, in the Bible. Objections many of them without any foundation in truth, and which therefore only serve to betray the ignorance and conceit of those who would obtrude them upon us. But whatever weight there may be in any of them, which our time will not allow us now particularly to consider, I persuade myself an attentive recollection of what has been said respecting *inspiration*, will possess us of the means of easily solving these pretended difficulties.

(3.) How amazing is the condescension and goodness of God, in opening a way of intercourse with men so natural, easy, and pleasant as this of an inspired written revelation.

For the book of nature and providence held up to the view of reason it becomes us to be thankful. But what wise man is there who will not acknowledge, that the human intellect itself is weakened and impaired, as well as that many of the objects with which it is conversant are enveloped in mystery and darkness? If God then will deign to communicate his will to us in the same familiar manner that men communicate their ideas to one another, surely we ought to acknowledge our obligations to his goodness with the warmest devotion and gratitude. And having affixed those ideas to the words he speaks which they were evidently meant to convey, it is most reasonable to admit that what he says is and must be true.—Once more,

(4.) Let me remind Christians, for their comfort, of the analogy there is between the divine communications with the inspired writers of the Bible, and those they are themselves warranted to seek and expect.

Here it behoves me to speak with the greatest caution, and to guard against every possible misconstruction of a sentiment, which some may perhaps think of dangerous tendency. I

mean not to say, that every good man is inspired in precisely the same manner, much less in the same degree as were the prophets and apostles. Yet the Scriptures do assert that *God dwells in them* a that love him, and that *they are the temples of the living God* b. Each of the particulars therefore we have insisted on in this discourse, are, in a sense, applicable to every genuine disciple of Christ.

There is a *superintending* influence exerted over the minds of good men, to secure them from such errors as may prove fatal to their everlasting interests. He who has assured us, that *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God* c, hath also assured us, that they who are of this description are *his sheep*, who *know his voice*, and *know not that of strangers*; and that *being in his Father's hand, no one is able to pluck them thence* d. And as that *anointing which* all Christians *have received from God abideth* in them, so it may from thence, I think, be concluded, that *that truth which it teaches* them, so far as it is essential to their Christian character, *shall abide in them* e. And since Christ has assured us that *God will give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him* f, I see no reason why a *superintending* influence exerted over the mind to guard it against errors of a dangerous tendency, may not be considered as included in that promise. And how happily is this consideration adapted to afford divine consolation to the sincere and conscientious Christian!

It is likewise by a divine influence, resembling in a degree the second species of inspiration we have been discoursing of, that the hearts of good men, are on some extraordinary occasions enlivened and *elevated*. While they are musing on the great truths of religion, the character of the blessed God, the wonders of redemption, and the glories of the future state; a flame of pure devotion is sometimes kindled in their breasts, and ascends to heaven in the warmest aspirations of love, gratitude, and praise. Inspired, I had almost said, by a divine afflatus, they catch somewhat of the fire which burns incessant-

a 1 John iv. 16. b 2 Cor. vi. 16. c John vii. 17.
d John x. 4, 5, 29. e 1 John ii. 27. f Luke xi. 13.

ly in the bosoms of kindred spirits above. And upon what principle either of reason or religion the influence of the Holy Spirit is to be excluded from all concern in these exercises of exalted piety, I am at a loss to devise.

As to the last idea of *suggestion*, I am sensible it has been miserably abused by many enthusiastic pretenders to religion. Yet it appears to me perfectly agreeable with sound reason and the dictates of Scripture, to admit that God is sometimes pleased to apply with peculiar energy the gracious promises of his word to the hearts of Christians, for the important purposes of animating them to duty, fortifying them against temptation, and reconciling them to affliction. Nor is there any danger of their mistakenly imputing this energy to the influence of the Holy Spirit, if the effect of such experience is, as we may be sure it always will be, to produce the genuine fruits of humility, holiness, and benevolence. Let us daily and fervently pray, that our minds may be guarded against error, our affections elevated to heaven, and our hearts enlivened and comforted by that *inspiration of the Almighty* which *giveth understanding* [a].

[a] Job xxxii. 8.

DISCOURSE III.

THE SCRIPTURES PROVED TO BE DIVINELY INSPIRED.

2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.—*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

In discoursing upon this important subject I have proposed—to explain the term *Scripture*, and shew what is comprehended in the phrase of *all* Scripture—to enquire into the true and proper meaning of *divine inspiration*—to prove that the Scriptures are thus inspired—to consider their use as described in the text—and then to improve the whole.

The two first of these were the subjects of the two preceding discourses. In the former we ascertained the canon of Scripture, pointing out the grounds upon which the several books of *The Old* and *New Testaments* which make up our Bible, are received as Scripture; and on the contrary, the reasons why other books which pretend to divine authority are rejected.

In the last Sermon we discoursed of the nature of *divine inspiration*. By this phrase is meant "a supernatural influence exerted over the mind, whereby its faculties are instantly improved to a degree they could not have acquired by the mere unassisted powers of nature." This we exemplified in two or three instances. We then shewed you, that to question the possibility of God's having access to the mind, assisting its faculties, and communicating to it by immediate revelation a clear and compendious view of his will, is most unreasonable. So we passed on to the main point, How this influence was exerted over the minds of the inspired writers? A physical account of this matter is not to be expected. All attempts to

explain the influence itself, the manner of its operation, its degree, limits, and extent, must in the nature of the thing be attended with uncertainty. Which is also evident from the figurative mode of expression used to convey to our minds a general idea of this sublime subject. The word *inspiration* has evident reference to the *wind*, which latter term is in Scripture put by analogy for the soul of man, and with the attribute *holy* for God. From hence we were naturally led to observe three things of that divine afflatus of which the Scriptures so frequently speak—its mysteriousness, which is a reason why we should be modest in our enquiries about it; the different degrees of it in different instances; and the real and important effects resulting from it, which is indeed what we are principally concerned to know.

So we proceeded to a more particular investigation of the subject. Here we considered *divine inspiration* in three points of view, clearly distinguishable from each other, and sufficiently warranted by Scripture—inspiration of *superintendency*, of *elevation*, and of *suggestion*. These we explained, and considered them as we passed on in reference to historical facts, doctrinal truths, and future events. Such was the business of the last sermon. And now we proceed to the third head of discourse, which is,

III. To prove that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are thus inspired.—We shall begin with the New Testament, and so lead you back to the Old. The reason of this inversion of order in proving the divine inspiration of the Scriptures, will appear in the sequel.

FIRST, To begin then with the *New Testament*.

The New Testament, for the matter of it, consists of three parts—historical facts—doctrinal truths, by which I mean a declaration of the intent for which those facts took place—and predictions of future events. Now in order to prove, that the writers of the several books of which the New Testament is composed, were divinely inspired, it will be necessary to establish the following Propositions:

1. "That the grand leading facts reported in these books, and of consequence all the rest, are credible."

2. "That it was natural to expect that these facts, and a declaration of the true intent of them, should be committed to writing;"

3. "That this could not be done, so as to compass the salutary end proposed, without extraordinary divine assistance;"

4. "That such assistance was promised by our Saviour to his apostles, and that they affirmed it was granted them;"

5. "That this fact was universally admitted by the primitive Christians, and has continued to be acknowledged to the present time;" And,

6. And lastly, "That there are evident internal characters in these books of divine inspiration." If these propositions can be made good, the grand point we mean to establish will be proved to a demonstration.

1. "The leading facts reported in the New Testament are credible."

To say that the writers of the New Testament were inspired, and therefore the facts they related must be true, would be arguing in a circle. The point to be proved is that the reporters of them were inspired. We must begin therefore with proving the credibility of the facts themselves upon the general ground of historical evidence. What then were these facts? By whom were they reported? And what credit did their report gain when first made, and in succeeding ages?

The leading facts, for our time will not allow us to mention them all, were such as these. JESUS, an extraordinary person, who had been foretold by the ancient prophets under the character of the Messiah, and was in the reign of Augustus Cæsar generally expected among the Jews, was conceived in a miraculous manner by a virgin of the family of David. His birth at a town called Bethlehem was announced by a host of angels to a company of shepherds in the neighbourhood of that place. Certain wise men of the east, guided by a star, came thither to pay him divine homage. John, an illustrious prophet, was sent to signify his coming, and to prepare his way before him. At his baptism a voice was heard from heaven, saying, THIS IS MY BELOVED SON, IN WHOM I AM WELL PLEASED. Anointed by the Holy Spirit, he entered on his

public ministry, delivered truths the most sublime with an energy not to be resisted, adorned those truths by an example the most perfect and glorious, performed miracles august and stupendous, and having poured a thousand blessings on mankind, was at length put to death, in the presence of innumerable spectators, in the most cruel and ignominious manner. The sun upon this occasion withdrew his light, the earth was shaken, and the veil of the temple rent in twain. He was buried. At the exact time foretold by himself, he arose from the grave. And having been often seen by his apostles, and upon one occasion by five hundred brethren together, he ascended through the clouds into heaven; angels attending the glorious solemnity, and assuring the astonished disciples, that in like manner he would another day come to judge the world. These facts were followed by others no less extraordinary which had been foretold by Christ, and which accompanied the first publication of the gospel at Jerusalem, and its spread through the Roman empire.

Now all these events, with an infinite variety of circumstances attending them, are related in the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles with the greatest accuracy, and yet with the most artless simplicity.

The question then is, Are these facts credible? They are. Nothing is here related that contradicts itself, involves in it an absurdity, or is impossible. The persons who report these facts were eye-witnesses of them, agree in their testimony concerning them, and laid down their lives in confirmation of that testimony. The miracles of our Saviour and his apostles were not a few but many, performed not in a corner but in the face of the whole world, not in the presence of friends only but enemies. The accounts given of them in the New Testament, were published in the age and in the country where they happened, and so were appeals to the knowledge, memory, and senses of thousands of people then living. Had they been false they would no doubt have been immediately contradicted, and soon met with the fate of all idle tales, that of being lost in utter oblivion. On the contrary, profane history agrees with sacred, and the testimonies both of Jews and

Pagans, as well as the ancient Christians, confirm the leading events related by the evangelists. Nor is it imaginable that the gospel history, after having been translated into all languages, and submitted to the examination of all sorts of persons for a series of seventeen hundred years, should be so generally received as an authentic history, and by so many wise and good men, if it were indeed a mere fiction, a cunningly devised fable.

But enough has been said to prove the credibility of the leading facts of the New Testament. And it were easy to shew, that the principles upon which their credibility has been attacked by infidels, go to the subversion of all historical evidence, and of consequence to the utter annihilation of all the knowledge we acquire in this way.

Thus have we established our first proposition, "That the leading facts reported in these books are credible." This admitted, it follows,

2. "That it was natural to expect that these facts, and a declaration of the true intent of them, should be committed to writing."

This proposition is so plain as to need little or no illustration. Those principles which have in all ages given existence to historical productions, would no doubt operate forcibly in this case. Every motive of curiosity and piety would induce men to wish, that a narrative of facts so extraordinary might be accurately drawn, and fully authenticated, for the use of that and succeeding ages. To suppose the contrary would be to suppose mankind different from what they have ever been, and stupid beyond all imagination.

And the same consideration which would induce men to collect the evidence and preserve the remembrance of these facts, would also induce them to enquire into the true intent and meaning of them. For as they must have been the effect of more than human agency, and of nothing short of a preternatural interposition of divine providence, so no doubt some important purposes worthy of God were to be answered thereby. And as it might reasonably be concluded that infinite wisdom would observe a proportion between the means and

the end, so it might be concluded from the stupendous nature of these facts, that the ends proposed thereby must be magnificently great and glorious. But how should these ends be satisfactorily known, even though they might in general be guessed at, without an immediate and positive revelation from God? If then the men who did these astonishing deeds, took upon them to declare the ends for which they were performed, it was as natural to expect that such declaration should be committed to writing as the deeds themselves.

And thus we see the grounds upon which it might be reasonably wished and expected that the two grand constituent parts of the New Testament, the historical and doctrinal, should be committed to writing. And the same may be observed of the prophetical parts of the New Testament, if it is credible, as it most certainly is, that these men did deliver predictions of future events.—And this leads us to our third Proposition,

3. "That the committing these matters to writing in such a manner as to secure the salutary ends thereby proposed, could not be effected without extraordinary divine assistance."

Whoever takes a general view of the New Testament must acknowledge, that the professed intent of the writers of it was most beneficial and important, even the making men wise unto salvation. But this end could not be attained, if the facts, doctrines, and prophecies it contains were not so stated, as that we might assuredly depend upon their truth in every particular. For however this book might in the general be true, yet a failure in any part of it would beget such doubts in a considerate mind respecting the whole, as would counteract the professed intent of it: it would stifle in the very birth all those divine principles of faith, hope, love, and devotion which constitute a real Christian. Let us apply this reasoning to each constituent part of the New Testament just mentioned, and we shall see the force of it to prove the indispensible necessity of a divine interposition in the writing this book.

(1.) As to the *historical* parts of the New Testament.

Although the writers of these books were eye witnesses of the facts they relate, and men of sense and veracity, yet if

they had not been divinely assisted, such mistakes must have crept into their narratives as would have rendered the effect of the whole doubtful and precarious. The facts related were very numerous and took up a large compass of time. The circumstances of many of them are mentioned, as well as the time when and the place where they happened. Discourses and dialogues of a considerable length are recorded. The writers were men of different natural and acquired abilities. Their stories were not published, and it is probable not committed to writing, till some years after the events took place. They did not write in concert with each other, upon the same plan, or after the same manner.

Now all this being the case, how could it possibly have so happened, that they should be guilty of no mistake, no misnomer, no anachronism, no disagreement in their testimony; if their several productions had been the mere result of their own recollection and memory? It is not imaginable. Let a man of the most retentive memory set himself to relate verbatim a discourse, which he heard eight or ten years ago, and of the same length with that of our Saviour's on the mount; and he will quickly feel not only the difficulty but the impossibility of succeeding.

It appears therefore from the nature of the thing, that a divine superintendency was necessary to secure the evangelists from otherwise unavoidable errors, which would have been followed with the most fatal consequences.—The same reasoning holds good,

(2.) Respecting the *doctrinal* parts of the New Testament.

The right understanding of the grand intent of these extraordinary events, which is what we mean by Scripture doctrine, is a matter of as great importance if not greater than the knowledge of the events themselves. This in the full extent of it could be known only to God, our information therefore on this head must come from him. And seeing he was disposed of his mercy to lay open the mystery of the gospel to our view, it was fit, it was necessary, that it should be conceived in language dictated by himself, and so with an accuracy that should preclude all suspicion of error or equivo-

cation. But such accuracy could not have been expected, had the writers of the New Testament, however honest, been left to themselves in reporting to us the scheme of salvation; and of consequence their writings could not have been an infallible test to be appealed to by Christians of every description.

If it be objected that, with all the supposed advantage of divine inspiration, there is obscurity in the Scriptures, it is to be remembered that *that* obscurity is no other than what arises out of the nature of some particular subjects treated of, and what God was pleased for wise ends to suffer. And it is certain, be the obscurity complained of what it may, the grand intent of Heaven in our redemption by the sacrifice and death of Christ, is held up clearly to our view, and the connection and proportion between the means and the end so plainly marked, as to reflect infinite beauty and glory upon the whole plan. This objection therefore does not at all affect the question of the necessity of a divine interference in the statement of the Christian doctrine.

Upon the whole—We see the most astonishing events take place. We ask the meaning of them. Who shall answer? Not fallible mere men surely, but God. Conjectures here will not do. Nothing will satisfy, but a reply from him who is the great agent in the whole business—a reply that shall command our faith, and silence all objection.—The like reasoning is applicable also,

(3.) To the *prophetical* parts of the New Testament.

Infinite wisdom seeing it fit to communicate to the primitive Christians and to succeeding ages, certain predictions of future events, the fulfilment of which should in its gradual progress serve the purpose of a continual miraculous confirmation of the truth of Scripture, and the further purpose of cherishing our faith and devotion; Infinite wisdom, I say, seeing this necessary, it became also necessary that these prophecies should be delivered to us, not by tradition, but writing, and not by the mere report of those to whom the prophets first delivered them, but in the immediate language of inspiration. —And now from the manifest necessity of divine inspiration in each of these cases, we go on to observe,

4. "That our Saviour did promise to the apostles the gift of inspiration, and that they did affirm that they were divinely inspired."

The establishment of this proposition, after what has been said, will put the question of inspiration beyond a doubt. For if the writers of the New Testament were not inspired, their affirming that Christ promised them the gift of inspiration and did actually confer it on them, was a falsehood, and so would destroy the credibility of their testimony concerning all the other great facts they reported. But the credibility of their narrative has been proved, and it has been further shewn that it was fit it should be committed to writing, and that it could not be written so as to answer the ends of its publication without extraordinary divine assistance. It follows therefore that their affirmation that they were inspired, fully and clearly proves the point. All we have to do here then is, to consider what Christ and his apostles have asserted respecting this matter.

(1.) As to Christ, the assurances he gave his apostles upon this head are very clear and explicit.

'I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever. Even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you *a*.'—'The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you *b*.'—'When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me. And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning *c*.' Once more,—'When the Spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All

a John xiv. 16, 17. *b* Ver. 26. *c* John xv. 26, 27.

things that the Father hath, are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you *a*.

Now here you observe that Christ describes the Holy Spirit as *the Spirit of truth*. He tells them that this Spirit *should be in them—should dwell with them*—and *abide with them for ever*. That this Spirit *should teach them all things—bring all things which he had said to their remembrance—take of the things that were his and shew them unto them—guide them into all truth—testify of him*—and *shew them things to come*. All this variety of expression does he use to convey an idea of what we have shewn is meant by *inspiration*.

And this influence he expressly declares was to be exerted on their minds, to the end that they *who had been with him from the beginning, might bear witness*—bear witness of the great facts which they had with their own eyes beheld, and of all those other matters which should be shewn them. Accordingly after his resurrection, having shewn himself to them, and solemnly commissioned them to publish his will to the world, it is said, *He breathed on them, and said unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost b*.

Nor should we forget to take notice here of the mode of expression our Lord used when he sent forth the seventy disciples to preach the gospel, during the course of his own ministry: for though this does not immediately respect the composition of the books of the New Testament, yet it serves to fix the true import of the word inspiration. *Ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak, for it shall be given to you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you c*. In like manner, *The Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say d*. And after his resurrection, he bade them *tarry in Jerusalem, until they were endued with power from on high*; and commanded *that they should not depart from thence, but wait for the promise of the Father which*

a John xvi. 13—15. *b* John xx. 22.
c Matt. x. 18—20. *d* Luke xii. 12.

they had heard of him, to wit, *that they should be baptized with the Holy Ghost a.*

Now though some of these promises of our Saviour might more immediately refer, as we just now observed, to the extraordinary assistance they should receive in preaching the gospel, and to the wonderful effusion of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost; yet it is evident from the manner in which some of them are worded, viz. that *the Spirit* should *abide in them for ever*, should *guide them into all truth*, and *shew them things to come*, that they respect the penning the New Testament scriptures, as well as their public preaching. And this will more fully appear if we consider,

(2.) What were the claims of the apostles.

Now the terms in which they speak both of their preaching and writings, and the implicit regard they challenge from their hearers and readers both to the one and the other, clearly shew that they were conscious of such inspiration.

To begin with the apostle Paul. The kind of language he holds, of which we shall give you a few specimens, is this. *God hath revealed unto us* the things of the gospel *by his Spirit*, even *the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God b.—We speak not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth.—We have the mind of Christ c.—The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord d.*—Speaking of the Lord's Supper he says, *That which I delivered unto you I received of the Lord e.*—Those among the Corinthians who had sinned and repented, he tells them, *he forgave in the person of Christ f.*—And he expressly affirms that *Christ spake in him g.*—To the Galatians he thus speaks of his divine commission, *I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me, is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ h.*—Speaking to the Ephesians of the *dispensation of the grace of God*, and *of his understanding in*

a Luke xxiv. 49.—Acts i. 4, 5. *b* 1 Cor. ii. 10, 12.
c Ver. 13, 16. *d* 1 Cor. xiv. 37. *e* 1 Cor. xi. 23.
f 2 Cor. ii. 10. *g* 2 Cor. xiii. 3. *h* Gal. i. 11, 12.

the mystery of Christ, he says, that God had *revealed it to him; and* not only to him, but also *his* other *holy apostles and prophets a.*

Now if to these passages you add those wherein he magnifies his office, commands attention to his instructions as a divine teacher, and threatens the refractory and disobedient with extraordinary expressions of God's displeasure; and at the same time remember what was the genuine, not assumed, character of the apostle, how modest, humble, gentle, and benevolent he was; you cannot doubt but he knew himself to be inspired of God.—To proceed,

The like evidence we have in the apostle Peter's writings, of his considering himself and the other apostles as inspired of God. 'They preached the gospel of Christ,' he says, 'with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven *b.*'—He admonishes Christians in general, 'to be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and, (he adds,) of the commandments of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour *c.*' —And the following testimony he particularly bears to the inspired authority of all the apostle Paul's epistles. 'Account,' says he, 'that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you. As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction *d.*'

To the testimonies of the apostles Paul and Peter let me only add that of the apostle John, the beloved disciple of Christ, and who was so remarkable for his meekness and modesty. He speaks of the Christians to whom he writ, as *having an unction from the Holy One, and knowing all things e.* And afterwards thus authoritatively expresses himself, *We are of God: he that knoweth God, heareth us; he that is not of God, heareth not us: hereby know we the Spirit of truth, and the spirit of error f.* And no one can read the

a Eph. iii. 3, 5. *b* 1 Pet. i. 12. *c* 2 Epist. iii. 2.
d Ver. 15, 16. *e* 1 John ii. 20. *f* Chap. iv. 6.

book of Revelation without knowing that this apostle, who was the writer of it, asserts in the strongest terms that he was inspired of God; guarding in the most authoritative manner the contents of it against all additions, exceptions, and interpolations.

Thus have we proved our fourth Proposition, "That Christ did promise his apostles the gift of inspiration, and that they did affirm that they were divinely inspired."

But we must not leave this head, on which we have so largely insisted, without making one further observation, which has no small weight to establish the point before us. It is this, Every attentive reader of the New Testament must have observed, that there are many passages in it which speak of the discoveries made in this latter part of divine revelation, as far superior to those of the former. *The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ a.* The former was *the ministration of the letter*, the latter *of the Spirit. That* was *glorious*, but *this more glorious.* That, for wise purposes cast a veil over many important truths, but in this 'we behold with open face, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord *b.*' 'God *then* spake unto the fathers by the prophets, *but* in these last days hath spoken unto us by his Son *c.*'

If then the Old Testament scriptures (although the discoveries made in them were vastly inferior to those in the New) were, as we shall hereafter shew, the *oracles of God* and *given by inspiration*; surely it is most natural to conclude, that the New must have been the fruit of divine inspiration also; and that the writers of the New Testament do, by giving the preference to it, mean hereby to assure us that they were themselves inspired of God.

Having thus largely shewn you that the apostles do plainly and unequivocally claim divine inspiration, it follows as a necessary consequence, that if this claim was without foundation, they must have been bad men, impostors, the worst of impostors. And how such a character of them can consist with the accounts we have of the doctrine they propagated, the kind of lives they lived, and the sufferings they endured in the cause,

a John i. 17. *b* 2 Cor. iii. 6, 11, 18. *c* Heb. i. 1, 2.

of Christianity, it lies upon unbelievers who boast of their sagacity to shew.—But we must now go on to our fifth Proposition,

5. "That the fact of their having been inspired was universally acknowledged by the primitive Christians, and has continued to be admitted to the present time."

As to the primitive Christians, I might mention the testimonies of Clemens Romanus, Polycarp, Justin Martyr, Irenæus, and many others. Several of them, and particularly Origen, and Tertullian, speak of the inspiration of Scripture and of the veneration in which it was on that account held, as a matter in which all were unanimous. And that this idea of the New Testament has obtained through all succeeding ages to the present time, is a fact so well known that no pains need to be taken to prove it.

That infidels who consider the whole of the Christian religion as a cunningly devised fable, deny the divine inspiration of the New Testament is admitted. But of those who allow the truth of the gospel history, and yet object to its being written by divine inspiration, the number is very small if indeed there are any such. And although there are others who yield this claim to the gospels but deny it to the epistles, or at least consider the writers of them as not always under that kind of superintending influence which was necessary to secure them from error; though, I say, there may be some, yet it is to be hoped there are not many, of this description. The evil however, it is to be feared, is increasing: approaches of an alarming nature have been made towards it. But a recollection of the reasoning of this and the two former discourses, will I persuade myself convince you, that if inspiration be not admitted, in the extent, and at the same time under the restrictions that have been represented, it will be difficult to prove that it existed at all. And you cannot but be sensible that if one part of the New Testament is to be considered as inspired, and another as a mere human production, the whole must cease to be an infallible test; unless a clear line could be authoritatively drawn between the one and the other, which would require a further revelation from heaven.—But to return to our argument,

The fact, as it has been stated, of general consent is hardly to be accounted for, if the doctrine of inspiration were without ground to support it. But if the proofs we have adduced in favour of it are clear and demonstrative, this fact of general consent is no other than might naturally be expected.—But there remains one further proposition to be considered, and that is,

6. And lastly, "That there are in the New Testament evident internal characters of divine inspiration."

The simplicity of its narrations, the sublimity of its doctrines, the purity of its morals, its efficacy to the noblest and most important purposes on the hearts of thousands, and the daily fulfilment of its predictions before our eyes, all concur, in the most striking manner, to confirm the proofs which have been laid before you of its divine authority. These particulars we cannot now enter into; they must be referred to the next discourse, wherein we are to consider THE VARIOUS USE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES. And in treating on this subject we shall have an opportunity of appealing for the truth of what we have been establishing, not only to the enlightened reasonings of your minds, Christians, but to the devout feelings of your hearts.

It will now be said, You have proved the New Testament to be inspired: but how does it appear,

SECONDLY, That the Old Testament scriptures were inspired?

My reply to this question will be short, but no less clear and demonstrative. If then the New Testament every where proceeds on this principle of the divine authority of the Old, and if our Saviour and his apostles clearly and fully assert it, there can be no reasonable doubt of the matter. But this is the fact.

The Jews, it is well known, had the highest veneration for their Scriptures as inspired by God. Our Lord confirms the fact by commanding them *to search the Scriptures*, affirming that *they testified of him*, and that *Moses wrote of him* a. He frequently referred in his discourses to the Old Testament

a John v. 39, 46.

scriptures, ever speaking of them with the greatest reverence. In the synagogue at Nazareth he read a passage out of the prophecy of Isaiah, and then assured his hearers that *this Scripture was that day fulfilled in their ears a.* When he reminds the Jews of David's *having called the Messiah Lord,* he tells them that he did this *in the Spirit b.* After his resurrection in his conversation with the disciples in their way to Emmaus, *beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the Scriptures, the things concerning himself c.* And afterwards he reminds others of his disciples, that *he had told them, while he was yet with them, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms concerning him d.*

The evangelists, particularly Matthew, often quote passages from the Old Testament, and apply them to Christ, and to a variety of events as they arose. The Acts of the Apostles have many and large references to those sacred books, as have also the Epistles. The apostle Paul speaks of them as *the oracles of God e.* He tells us in the text that all Scripture, meaning no doubt all the books that were then acknowledged to make up the canon of the Old Testament, *was given by inspiration of God.* The apostle Peter tells us, that *of the salvation* which the gospel reveals, 'the prophets enquired, and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto us. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow *f.*' And again,—'No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost *g.*'—From these and a multitude of other passages I might quote, it appears with all the evidence of meridian brightness, that the New Testament establishes the divine inspiration of the Old.

Thus have we proved, that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God.* The conclusions to be drawn from this doctrine

a Luke iv. 21. *b* Matt. xxii. 43. *c* Luke xxiv. 27. *d* Ver. 44.
e Rom. iii. 2. *f* 1 Pet. i. 10, 11. *g* 2 Epist. i. 20, 21.

are numerous and important, and will be the subject of future consideration. In the mean time let me entreat you—to consider well the evidence that has been laid before you—to yield the fullest assent to it—and to treat Scripture with that respect and veneration which its divine authority demands.

(1.) Consider well the evidence that has been laid before you of the divine inspiration of the holy Scriptures.

As to those who having taken the side of infidelity, will give themselves no further trouble upon the matter, let me tell you, Sirs, the contemptuous manner in which you thrust this great question from you, is a clear proof both of impiety and folly—of impiety, as it argues a base subjection to criminal passions—of folly, as it betrays a stupid inattention to your best interests. Think it not strange therefore, that I remind you of the awful consequence of thus wilfully shutting your eyes against the evidence held up to your view. If you will not listen to the sober dictates of reason now, you must be content to endure the reproaches of conscience, when all attempts to silence its clamours will prove fruitless.

But there are men of another description, and these not a few, who taking it for granted that the Bible is an inspired book, consider all enquiry into the evidence of this great truth as unnecessary. "We have been ever used, say they, to view the Scriptures in this light, it is the settled opinion of our religious connections, and the established doctrine of our country; we have therefore no doubts upon the matter. Why then all these pains to prove a plain and acknowledged fact?" But alas! how insensible are such people of this undeniable truth, that an assent to the Bible purely on these grounds is insufficient to the great purposes of religion. Their faith is not founded upon the testimony of God, but of man: and however they may suppose it to be genuine, yet if put to the trial by the sophistry of infidels, or the menaces of persecution, it would quickly fail them. Indeed the failure of these professing Christians in the substantial duties of piety and benevolence, and I might add the ill lives of some of them, puts it beyond a doubt that their faith is not divine, or such as in the sense of the Bible constitutes a real disciple of Christ. Do

I speak to any here of this description? Be assured, my friends, you never believed to any valuable purpose, if you never doubted. It is high time to consider seriously on what ground your profession stands. Be not angry with us for taking pains to prove what you have always admitted, but never yet believed to the saving of your souls. A diligent enquiry into these things will, I hope, prove the mean of rousing you from your security, and of giving existence to such a persuasion of the divine authority of Scripture as will be productive of the most salutary effects.

There are others again, who though not acquainted with all the proofs that have been adduced of the inspiration of the Bible, yet upon a general view of them, accompanied with the evidence arising from the mighty influence of God's word on their hearts, have truly assented to its divine authority. Such we congratulate as real Christians. And such I am persuaded will readily fall in with our earnest entreaties, to consider attentively the reasoning of this discourse. If then upon a review of what has been said, the argument should strike us all as clear and demonstrative, let us, whatever may have been our opinion or character hitherto,

(2.) Yield a firm and cordial assent to the truth.

I am sensible the admitting Scripture to be the word of God, must be followed with painful consequences to those whose consciences convict them of their past guilt; and there are none of us but must plead guilty at the tribunal of the great God. But this consideration should have no effect to pervert the judgment in its determination on a matter of fact; for that must remain the same be the consequence to us what it may. And on the other hand, if the Bible were the mere invention of men, it would still be true that we have sinned and deserved the wrath of Almighty God. But it is to be considered, that however this book arraigns, convicts, and condemns every individual of the human race; it fails not at the same time to report the glad tidings of forgiveness to the greatest offender, who repents of his sins and believes in the Son of God. It casts down that it may raise up, wounds that it may heal, kills that it may make alive. If therefore the

painful consequence of admitting Scripture to be true should, in this case, at all operate to prejudice the understanding and judgment; the joyful consequence resulting thence should also operate as a balance against that prejudice. Let us then not only admit the truth, but admit it with the greatest cordiality and joy.—Once more,

(3.) Persuaded of their divine authority, with what respect and veneration should we treat the holy Scriptures!

The indecent liberties which many take with this book, who yet would be considered as the friends of it, cannot be enough lamented. With that levity, if not affectation of wit, do some interweave the language of Scripture with their familiar discourse! And how irreverently do others bring forward, into all companies where they come, the sublime truths of the Bible, starting difficulties with no other view than to display their dexterity at an argument! Some we hear excepting against this and some against that part of Scripture, upon pretences which, if admitted, would shake our faith in the divine authority of the whole, or however deprive us of the advantage it was meant we should reap from it as a divine test. Some we see putting the most unnatural force on particular passages of holy writ, to answer the purposes of a party, a system, or a favourite opinion. Some attempting to extract that from Scripture which no sober man can persuade himself was ever in it. Some converting plain history into symbolic prophecy. And some creating doubts in their hearers of the most substantial truths of religion, if not exposing them to scorn, by grounding them on the mere circumstances of an allegory or parable.

These, and many other freedoms which men take with their Bibles, cannot be enumerated without giving pain to a serious mind. But to what are they owing? To the want, no doubt, of that reverence for the holy Scriptures which their divine authority demands. Let us then, while we are lamenting these evils, cherish in our breasts that ardent piety which is the best antidote against them. Let us read the Bible, hear its truths and duties discoursed of, and talk of them to one another, with an awe of God upon our spirits. Nor let us at-

tempt, with levity and indiscretion, even the defence of the sacred oracles, remembering what befel Uzzah when *he* inconsiderately *put forth his hand to hold up the ark of the Lord* when *the oxen shook it a*. In fine, let us charge it upon ourselves to listen to the voice of God in his word, with that reverence the Israelites felt, when Jehovah deigned himself to pronounce the ten commandments in their hearing on the holy mount; and at the same time with that sacred pleasure which glowed in the bosoms of the disciples, when they heard the gracious words which proceeded from the lips of Jesus in the synagogue of Nazareth.

DISCOURSE IV.

THE VARIOUS USE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES CONSIDERED.

2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.—*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

In our former discourses on this subject, we have explained the phrase *all Scripture*, shewn you of what books the Bible consists, and by what rules we are to be guided in fixing the sacred canon. So we have proceeded to ascertain the scripture meaning of the word *inspiration*, and to consider the nature and intent of this divine influence, so far as it relates to the committing the will of God to writing. From hence we have gone on, in the last discourse, to prove that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are thus inspired. And we are now,

a 2 Sam. vi. 6, 7.

IV. To consider the true and proper *Use* of the Scriptures. They are *profitable*, the text says, *for doctrine a*, that is, for the purpose of instructing us in the fundamental principles of religion.—For *reproof*, or *conviction b* as the word might be rendered, that is, for possessing us of criteria or arguments for the fully convincing our judgments of the absurdity and danger of errors opposed to those truths. For the apostle had been speaking of those *who resisted the truth, men of corrupt minds, reprobate*, or of no judgment, *concerning the faith c*; and of *evil men and seducers*, who should *wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived d*.—They are useful further for *correction e*, that is, for reproving or setting men right in regard of irregularities of conduct, which are here pointed out, exposed, and authoritatively guarded against.—And for *instruction in righteousness f*, that is, for the purpose of leading us on step by step, as children under the instruction of a skilful master, in the path of divine knowledge, piety, and holiness.

And such is the use of Scripture to *the man of God*, to every godly man who devoutly reads it, but especially to the Christian minister, who seems here chiefly intended by this honourable character; for the apostle had been particularly speaking of the knowledge which Timothy had acquired in the Scriptures, and in the words after the text exhorts him with great earnestness to the duties of an evangelist or preacher of the gospel. Now the Bible is singularly profitable to the man of God, to him who makes it his constant study: for hereby he becomes *perfect*, a complete well instructed minister, *a workman that needeth not to be ashamed g; thoroughly furnished* or fitted *for every good work*, or service proper to his function as a minister of Christ. Such is, I think, the obvious sense of the text.

Nor should we here forget to take notice of the apostle's commendation of the sacred Scriptures in the preceding verse, For having spoken of Timothy's knowing them from a child, he adds, that they were *able to make him wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus*. Upon which passage

a Διδασκαλίαν. b Ἐλεγχον. c Ver. 8. d Ver. 13.
e ἐπανόρθωσιν. f παιδίαν τὴν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ. g 2 Tim. ii. 15.

it is natural to observe, that the apostle clearly establishes the generally acknowledged connection between the Old and New Testament, and plainly intimates that the former receives its principal use from its reference to the latter, that is, to Jesus Christ the Messiah; for it is by faith in him that those Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation.

Having thus briefly explained the terms by which the apostle sets forth the excellence and utility of the Scriptures, let us proceed to a more particular consideration of this pleasing subject. And here I shall speak of the advantages which *mankind in general* derive from the Bible—and then of its use to *individuals*. On the latter of these we shall chiefly insist.

First, As to *mankind in general*. The advantages, civil, political, and moral which they derive from this sacred book, are much greater and more universal than is commonly imagined.

It may be difficult to throw ourselves back into a state of nature, and to determine precisely what would be our ideas and feelings in that situation. But it is probable that thus circumstanced we should put three kinds of questions to ourselves.—The first, questions of fact. "How came I into existence? How came this world into existence? Who existed before me? What is their history? Who will follow me? And what will happen to succeeding generations?"—The second would be questions respecting our powers, interests, and obligations as placed in civil society, and having a mutual dependance on each other. "Formed as I am upon the same plan with many beings around me, How am I to behave towards them, so as to secure my own and their peace and happiness?"—And probably the third and most important question would be, "What will become of me after death? Is there a future state? Shall I be miserable or happy in that state? And what is to be done to prevent the latter and secure the former?"

Now the solution of these questions would have great effect on the *civil interests* of mankind. It would give existence to arts and sciences, and to those active exertions whereby the present life is relieved of many evils, and its happiness considerably augmented. And it would be followed with advantages of a *moral* kind the most important to the order and well-being

of society. Wholly ignorant of these matters men would be selfish, fierce, and ungovernable. But with these lights, though but general and confused, they would become decent, civil, and sociable. Such has been the reasoning of wise and virtuous men in all ages.

From what source then was a satisfactory reply to these questions to be obtained? Some of them could only be solved by a revelation from heaven, and others, considering the depraved state of mankind, would have been very imperfectly developed by the light of nature. But the Bible gives a full and clear reply to them all, and by so doing affords no small assistance to history, philosophy, policy, and morality.

As to history, the Bible is confessedly the most ancient book in the world. It begins with the creation, and carries us down through a series of near four thousand years to the grand period of the coming of the Messiah. An event this the most important that ever took place in our world, and which, by its connection with the preceding and subsequent events related in the histories and prophecies of the Bible, gives us the most complete and harmonious view of the administration of divine providence that can in the present life be contemplated by the mind of man. Take away the light this sacred book affords, and you know nothing about the creation of the world, the deluge, and the new-peopling this wide extended globe. You are deprived of many important informations respecting the Assyrian and Persian monarchies; of those noble predictions which have been fulfilling from the time of Daniel to the present period; and of all the light which that wonderful prophet, and our divine Saviour and his apostles have thrown on times yet to come, and on the grand scenes which are to close the whole. Am I rash then in affirming that, however the Bible was not given to make us historians, astronomers, or philosophers, yet the men who are most celebrated for their improvements in natural knowledge, have received no small assistance from these venerable records?

As to *jurisprudence*, or that kind of knowledge which is necessary for the founding and governing states, republics, and kingdoms; it flows from this fountain in a manner little

apprehended even by those whom it most benefited. They who shine in the annals of fame for the services they rendered the world by their wise instructions in these matters, such as Solon, Lycurgus, Pythagoras, Zoroaster, Plato, and others, were not a little indebted to the divine oracles, how unwilling soever they were to acknowledge it. What there is too of wisdom in the writings of Mohammed may be traced back to the Scriptures, of which he failed not to make considerable use. And we all know who have any acquaintance with the history of later times, that as the abuse of the sacred writings by the Romanists, and their withholding them from the laity, contributed not a little to the ignorance and barbarism of the dark age; so the glorious Reformation which restored the Bible to the people, restored to them also the arts and sciences, commerce, liberty, and a thousand other advantages, of which by the loss of this blessed book men were deprived.

And if to all this you add the mighty influence of the *morality* of the Bible, supported as it is by the doctrine of rewards and punishments in a future state, to control the vices of men, and to regulate their external conduct; you will acknowledge that the world in general is infinitely indebted to the blessed God for this extraordinary revelation of his will. The duties men owe one another in civil society are here placed in the clearest light, and multitudes in every age have been powerfully and sweetly inclined to them, by motives here held up to their view the most sublime and noble. And others who have not entered into the spirit of this book, have yet been deterred, by its tremendous threatenings, from the perpetration of many horrid crimes to which they felt themselves strongly disposed.

It is also to be remembered, that what knowledge the pagan world in ancient times had, and what those who now flourish in remote parts have, of morals and a future state, there is good reason to apprehend they derived it from the Bible. It insinuated itself to them from this grand source through channels unseen and infinitely diversified. And indeed the opposers of revelation themselves owe the brightest part of that ar-

mour with which they fight against it to the Scriptures. What I mean is, that if this book had not existed they would have been strangers to many of those ideas and sentiments interwoven with their discourses which they ascribe to the mere light of nature and their own boasted invention.

So that the world, not this or that part of it only but the whole world, are benefited by the Bible, and after a manner unobserved and unacknowledged by the generality of mankind. Could you then extinguish this great luminary, more bright and glorious, more benign and genial than the sun; could you thrust men back into their primitive state, and deprive them of the very idea of those advantages they had derived from it, how wretched, how deplorably wretched, would be the condition of this world of ours! The arts and sciences would retire into darkness and oblivion, commerce and civilization would languish and die, order would depart from society, liberty would exchange her lovely form into licentiousness, men would rise up in arms against each other, and all the ignorance, brutality, and cruelty of savages would cover the whole face of the earth.—How immense then are the advantages, civil, political, and moral, which mankind in general derive from this sacred book!—Let us proceed to our principal object, which is,

Secondly, To point out the various use of the Scriptures to *individuals*.

Here I have to address myself to the understanding, conscience, affections, and experience of every man of God in this assembly. The Bible, my brethren, has been, is, and ever will be profitable to you.

The canon of Scripture was far from being complete in the time of David, yet he speaks of that part of it which was then enjoyed, in terms of the highest respect and veneration. 'The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be de-

sired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey, and the honey comb. Moreover, by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward *a*.'

Such is the psalmist's commendation of the five books of Moses, and of those few other divine records then extant. How justly may we apply it to the Bible in its present entire and perfect state! Let us reduce the sense of the whole, in connection with the language of the text which may be considered as a comment upon it, to the following propositions—The word of God *enlightens the understanding—convinces the judgment—comforts the heart—renews the affections*—and *governs the life* of every sincere Christian.

1. The word of God *enlightens the understanding.*

'The entrance of thy words,' says the psalmist, 'giveth light: it giveth understanding to the simple *b*.' When the sable garment of night is cast over the creation, and the heavens are covered with dark and impenetrable clouds, the works of God with all their beauty, harmony, and splendour retire from our view. In vain do we look upwards or cast our eyes around us. All is silence, darkness, and confusion. But when the sun, 'as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber *c*,' begins his race; when the sun ascends the vaulted heavens, and sheds his orient beams over our hemisphere, ten thousand beautiful objects present themselves to the wondering eye. The heavens, the earth, the hills, the vales, fields, woods, and rivers pour upon our sight. We see them in the order nature has arranged them, and with the advantage they may have derived from art and culture. The imagination before asleep awakes, rises into life, receives new ideas from every quarter, and is entertained with a rich variety of knowledge and speculation. So it is when the Sun of righteousness arises upon our benighted minds.

Ah! how ignorant, how miserably ignorant, are men while in their sins of God and themselves; of their interest and their danger; of the ways of providence and grace; life and death; this world and that which is to come! All is darkness

a Psal. xix. 7—11. *b* Psal. cxix. 30. *c* Psal. xix. 5.

comparatively speaking, darkness that may be felt. Some knowledge indeed is to be collected from the dim light of nature. Here and there an object is to be discerned by the feeble light of the sickly moon—the uncertain conjectures of fallible reason. But alas! how are men enveloped in the thick mists and fogs of prejudice and error, and often beguiled and led astray by the fiery meteors of wild and depraved passions! They think they are in the light of broad day, when they are really in the darkness of night; and amuse themselves with a few terrestrial objects within the narrow circle of sense, beyond which their understanding hath neither vigour nor inclination to stretch itself.

But how is the scene changed when the word of God, by its enlivening beams scatters these mists, pierces through the darkness of night, and shines in upon the soul with its native light and splendour! With the first ray of divine knowledge beaming upon the mind, the man discovers what he before scarce dreamed of, his own ignorance. By the help of this light he enters his heart, those chambers of imagery upon whose walls were pourtrayed the vile deities of his own polluted imagination. He discovers the base passions of pride, avarice, anger, selfishness, and sensuality. He sees himself to be a guilty, helpless, miserable creature; unworthy of the favour of God, and deserving of his wrath. He sees too by the same light the worth and dignity of his immortal soul, and the infinite importance of its final salvation.

This bright luminary rising upon him in all the splendour of the Christian revelation, disperses the thick and dark cloud that had shrouded the pavilion of the Almighty, and opens to his view an object most magnificently grand and delightfully amiable—the blessed God, arrayed in majesty and love, seated on a throne of grace, and commanding him to touch the sceptre of his mercy and live. It shews him the ascended Saviour in the character of an atoning priest, sprinkling the blood he shed on mount Calvary before the seat of injured justice, and mingling the fragrant incense of his merits with the broken sighs and groans of ingenuous penitence. It presents also to his view myriads of happy spirits offering, with one

voice, their loudest acclamations of praise to him that sitteth on the throne and to the Lamb for ever and ever. O blessed sight! a sight only to be beheld by the pure light of divine revelation.

This sun of righteousness shines too on every object around him, and gives a new tinge, a new cast, to all the scenes of life and death, of time and eternity. It gives deformity to vice and sin, and beauty to virtue and holiness. It disrobes prosperity of its tinsel habit, and raises up adversity from its languishing desponding state. It develops many a mystery in providence, and carries the eye through many a dark, rough, and trackless path. It marks the road that leads to everlasting life, describes its various windings, and throws a light upon its numerous duties. It points to the green pastures of divine consolation, and leads him beside the still waters. By the instructions of this blessed book he is taught where his dangers and temptations lie, and by what means he is to escape them. —The secret devices of the enemy are here laid open to his view, and his eye directed to the magazine whence he is to get armour for the fiercest conflict. Down to the shades of death this friendly guide conducts him, and shews him a safe, if not an easy and pleasant, way through that dark and lonesome vale: and thus opens a prospect to him beyond the confines of mortality, into the regions of eternal bliss and glory. With these, and a thousand other interesting truths and entertaining discoveries, does the word of God enlighten the understanding.—It is profitable further,

2. For the great purpose of *convincing the judgment and conscience.*

By *convincing the judgment,* I mean possessing the mind of the evidence of divine truth; and by *convincing the conscience,* I mean fixing on the heart a deep sense of the importance of certain real and alarming facts.

As to the former, the reasonings of God's word on the fundamental truths of religion are clear and convincing. No doctrine is here proposed to our faith, but on the grounds of such evidence as most reasonably demands our assent. What is declared, if capable of being comprehended by the human intel-

lect, carries its own proof with it. The argument is addressed not to our passions but our understanding; and our judgment, if not controlled by criminal prejudices, must and will approve. And if the truth asserted be of a nature surpassing the full comprehension of finite capacities, it yet claims our belief, and most rationally, on the decisive and authoritative testimony of the great God. So that it is true both of those plain doctrines and precepts, which more immediately respect our practice and a future state of rewards and punishments; and of those sublime truths which relate to the nature of God, the way of salvation by Christ, and the operations of the divine Spirit on the heart; it is true of them both that they are held up to our view in this book with such a blaze of evidence, as is abundantly convincing to a judgment emancipated from the dominion of sense and sin.

And this being the case, the word of God furnishes arguments every way sufficient to detect error, to lay open its numerous arts and subterfuges, and by *reproof*, or conviction as the text expresses it, to silence and overcome it. This is the grand test to which every question about God, religion, and a future world is to be brought, the dernier resort of every controversy, the bar at which every opinion is to be tried. It is treason against Heaven for any men or set of men to establish a judicature that shall share authority with the Bible, or shall dare to lord it over the consciences of their fellow-men. How profitable then the word of God in this view of it! The Bible! The Bible! that is the religion of Protestants, of all genuine Christians. *To the law, and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them a.*

But this word of God has also a convincing power in it, when set home upon the heart, in regard of those truths and facts, a practical sense of which is necessary to the existence of religion in the soul of man. It is the main instrument by which the Holy Spirit, whom our Saviour hath promised, *reproves the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment b. It is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged*

a Isa. viii. 20. b John xvi. 8.

sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart a. It is a hammer to break, and a fire to dissolve the hard and flinty heart.

If there be such an evil and bitter thing as sin, if the guilt men have contracted is heinous and aggravated, if their nature is wretchedly polluted and depraved, and if in this state they stand in danger every hour of the greatest miseries; if these are facts, it is fit, it is absolutely necessary, in order to their reconciliation to God and their final happiness, that a sense of them should be impressed on their hearts. And if death, judgment, and eternity are not mere creatures of the imagination, but awful realities, and very nearly approaching, (how soon no one knows) if, I say, these matters are indisputable, and the event of them most interesting; it is fit that a conviction of their certainty should be interwoven with the practical powers of the soul. Who does not see, who will not acknowledge, the force of this reasoning?

Well, but what are the feelings of mankind in general on these subjects? Not to speak of those who have made up their minds to infidelity, in order to lay their consciences asleep, what multitudes are there who admit the truth of these things, and yet are not affected with them! They are perfectly easy, though their house is on fire about them. They sport on the brink of a tremendous precipice. They slumber on the top of a mast. They sing in the midst of a storm, and laugh while the forked lightnings play around them, and the bellowing thunder rolls over their heads. Is not this the fact? Does not death, with his pale visage and his pointed arrows, present himself to their full view, and reak his malice now on one at their right hand, and then on another at their left? Does not the grave, the insatiable grave, open its mouth in their sight, and now swallow up this friend and then that? And yet they remain insensible. They tremble perhaps for a moment, but their fears quickly subside. Sin still domineers. Vice still holds them in captivity. Sense still triumphs over

a Heb. iv. 12.

reason. The charm is unbroken. And the wretched slave is led ignominiously as an ox to the slaughter, and as a fool to the correction of the stocks.

O how profitable then is the word of God for reproof and conviction! Yes, the word of God, accompanied by the same divine energy which gave it existence, has often performed this salutary office. By its all-commanding voice it has spoken those fears into life, which have proved an introduction to safety, tranquillity, and happiness. It has looked the stout sinner in the face, and authoritatively said to him 'Thou art the man.' It has brought up to his view his private vices as well as his public sins. It has arrested him, dragged him to the tribunal of conscience, charged him with his aggravated crimes, and obliged him to plead guilty. It has made death, judgment, and eternity pass in review before his astonished and affrighted eye, and forced him to cry out in the anguish of his heart, *What must I do to be saved? How shall I escape the wrath to come?* It was this word of God that fixed conviction on *their* consciences who embrued their hands in the blood of the Saviour, and made them exclaim, *Men, brethren, What shall we do?* It was this word that made a Felix, amidst all his criminal pleasures and unrighteous gains, and even upon the seat of judgment, tremble.

This word is profitable too, not only to convict notorious sinners of their guilt, but to reprove those of their secret sins and of the wretched depravity of their nature, who have valued themselves on their external decency and sobriety, and a long while remained insensible of their true state and character. It has torn aside the veil of self-deception, and shewn men the plague of their hearts. It has brought forward to their recollection their vain thoughts, proud reasonings, malevolent dispositions, bitter prejudices against religion, airy dreams, groundless hopes of happiness, and deceitful vows and promises. It has described the leading features of their character, and led them into the inmost recesses of their souls. It has developed all their fine spun reasonings, spoiled them of all their glorying, driven them from every false refuge of hope, *cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth it-*

self against the knowledge of God, and brought into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ a.

And while the word of God has done this, it has fixed on their minds a deep sense of the infinite value of their immortal souls; of the vast and indispensable importance of an interest in Christ, and the great blessings of the gospel; and of their need of a superior and almighty influence to renew their hearts, to assist them in their duties, to steel them against temptation, and to bring them at length to heaven.—So we are led to a further use of God's holy word, which is that,

3. Of *comforting the heart.*

Here a pleasing scene opens to our view—pleasing did I say! I had almost said enchanting. It is impossible for me to do justice to the subject. I cannot describe it in all its parts. I cannot point out all its beauties. I cannot place it in its infinitely diversified views. This book enlightens to entertain, and reproves to amend. It gives pain, that it may give pleasure; wounds, that it may heal; brings low, that it may raise up; strips us of all our fancied wealth, that it may possess us of durable riches and righteousness; and makes us for a few moments unhappy, that we may know, feel, and enjoy real, substantial, everlasting felicity.

To the dejected penitent sinner it speaks words of *strong consolation b.* It tells him how merciful God is, how gracious the Lord Jesus Christ, how rich the blood he shed upon the cross, how perfect his righteousness, and how prevalent his intercession. It tells him, *there is forgiveness with God that he may be feared c;* that *with him there is plenteous redemption d,* pardon for crimes of the deepest dye, and *salvation to the uttermost e.* It assures him that *Christ will cast out none that come to him f;* that he will embrace them in the arms of the tenderest love; smile on them as his friends, his brethren, his children; and do infinitely more for them than they can ask or think; that *he will give them his Holy Spirit g;* and that having given himself for them, he will with that gift *freely*

a 2 Cor. x. 5. *b* Heb. vi. 18. *c* Psal. cxxx. 4.
d Ver. 7. *e* Heb. vii. 25. *f* John vi. 37.
g Luke xi. 13.

ly give them all things a. It 'preaches good tidings to the meek, it binds up the broken hearted, it proclaims liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound—it gives to them that mourn in Zion beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness *b.*'

Yonder I see a poor sin-sick soul, stung to the very quick by the evenomed serpent, and just breathing out his last. And what says the good word of God to him? Look to the serpent of brass, cast up thy dying eyes to the crucified Saviour, *look and live c.*—There I see a miserable captive, groaning in silence and darkness, panting for light and liberty. And what says the word of God?—Be thy fetters unloosed, cast thy mantle around thee, follow me, as the angel said to Peter, and I will lead thee through the iron gates of oppression, and set thy feet in a large and open place.—There again I see an immortal soul in the depths of poverty and wretchedness, stript of all its boasted wealth, wounded, helpless, and half dead. And what says the word of God to him? It speaks the language of the good Samaritan, it pours oil and wine into his wounds, and commits him to the care of a gentle host.

In short, the word of God abounds with expressions of tenderness and love to the afflicted, in the first stage of religion—expressions adapted to the several figurative descriptions it gives of their character and condition. It assures them that the blessed God 'will not despise the day of small things *d*'—that 'though heaven is his throne,' yet 'in the heart of the contrite he will dwell *e*'—that 'he forgetteth not the cry of the humble *f*'—that 'no weapon formed against them shall prosper *g*'—that, 'like a shepherd, he will carry the lambs in his arms, and gently lead them that are with young *h*'—that 'a bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench, until he send forth judgment unto victory *i*'—that 'the good work he has begun in them he will

a Rom. viii. 32. *b* Isa. lxi. 1, 3. *c* Isa. xlv. 22.
d Zech. iv. 10. *e* Isa. lvii. 15. *f* Psal. ix. 12.
g Isa. liv. 17. *h* Isa. xl. 11. *i* Matt. xii. 20.

perform until the day of Jesus Christ *a*'—and that 'he will not forsake the work of his own hands *b*.' With these, and a thousand other kind and gracious words, does the book of God minister consolation to the young convert.

And then, as to Christians in the course of their profession, it were endless to enumerate the various sources of comfort it opens to their view. Are they in poverty? it brings them to the gate of divine beneficence, and assures them they shall not only receive alms sufficient for their support, but that *God will supply all their need, according to his riches in glory by Jesus Christ c*. It describes Providence in the character of a tender parent ever watchful over his offspring, and anxiously careful that they want no needful good thing.—*Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of these things d—Be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee e*.—Are they in worldly perplexity? it bids them *ask wisdom of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given them f*.

Do they languish on beds of sickness? it assures them that God *will make all their bed for them in their sickness g*, that *he puts their tears in his bottle h*, and that *their groaning is not hid from him i*. It reminds them of the pains and sorrows their incarnate Saviour once endured, and of his tender feeling with them even now in his exalted state *k*. It leads their views forward to the healthful and pleasant fields of paradise, where *the inhabitants shall no more say they are sick*, and from whence *pain and sorrow and crying* shall be for ever excluded *l*.

Do they follow their dear friends and relations to their graves, and there take a final leave of them? It shews them Christ standing as it were by them, mingling his tears with theirs, pointing to the blissful regions whither the departed spirit is gone, and giving his angels charge of its precious remains, till he shall come again, and *raise the vile body, and fashion it like unto his own most glorious body m*.

a Phil. i. 6. *b* Psal. cxxxviii. 8. *c* Phil. iv. 19.
d Luke xii. 30. *e* Heb. xiii. 5. *f* James i. 5.
g Psal. xli. 3. *h* Psal. lvi. 8. *i* Psal. xxxviii. 9.
k Heb. iv. 15, 16. *l* Isa. xxxiii. 24.—Rev. xxi. 4. *m* Phil. iii. 21.

Are they assaulted with temptations sore and long? Do troops of foes, subtle, fierce, and powerful, encompass them on every side? Do their fears rise high, and does the event appear to them doubtful if not fatal? This blessed book provides armour for them, armour made in heaven, sent down by a kind angel for their use, and to be girded on by their Captain the Prince of peace—the shield, the flaming shield, of divine faith—the bright helmet of celestial hope—and the firm, the well tempered breastplate of righteousness. It puts *itself* into their hand, and bids them take this the sword of the Spirit, and with it deal vengeance on all their foes *a*. It assures them that *Christ* their Leader *has overcome* sin, the world, death, and the powers of darkness; and that, *through him that loves them, they shall be more than conquerors b*.

Are they called forth to great and arduous services, to which they feel themselves unequal? This book bids them be of good cheer, assuring them that *the grace of God* shall be *sufficient for them c*, that *as their day their strength shall be d*, and that their vigour, *shall be renewed like the eagle's e*—every exertion shall be accompanied with a degree of pleasure—and their labours, however painful now shall be crowned with the rewards of heaven hereafter.—But I forbear. Read this book, Christian, with an attentive and believing eye, and you will find comfort, divine comfort, in its doctrines and promises, in its histories and examples at all times; but especially in seasons of temptation, and when he who first indited it is pleased to accompany it with the mighty energy of his grace. These are wells of consolation—the distant streams of the river that makes glad the city of God—the healing beams of the Sun of righteousness—the bread of God that strengthens the heart—and the wine that cheers them who are of a sorrowful spirit.—To proceed,

4. Another important use of God's word is *to renew the affections*. I must here only suggest a few general hints on which you will meditate at your leisure.

By the light in which the Bible places sin on the one hand,

a Eph. vi. 13—17. *b* Rom. viii. 37. *c* 2 Cor. xii. 9.
d Deut. xxxiii. 25. *e* Psal. ciii. 5.

and holiness on the other; by the estimate it gives of all sublunary things; by the sublime truths it reveals concerning God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the soul, death, and a future state; by its pure precepts, and exceeding great and precious promises; by its noble motives and blessed examples; all pressing on our mental sight, accompanied with the mighty and generous influence of divine grace, it raises, refines, and sublimates the affections. It gives a new bias to the soul, a new spring to the passions, a new bent to the inclinations. That is now conscientiously dreaded, which before was accounted at most a little evil. That is anxiously coveted, which before was considered as of no value. That is loved, which was once hated. That is admired, which formerly had no charms to attract. That is delighted in which the other day was most irksome. This word of God, thus received into the heart, sheds a sacred perfume through the soul, like that which filled the room when Mary brake her alabaster box of ointment, and poured it on the head of her divine master.—Once more, As the Bible enlightens, convinces, comforts, and renews, so,

5. And lastly, It *guides the conduct* of every sincere Christian.

Its use, in this view of it, might be pointed out in a great variety of important particulars. It is to the Christian the man of his counsel, to whom he resorts with every difficult question, every case of conscience. This is the map to direct his journey—the compass by which he steers his vessel over the ocean of life. This is his companion in his solitary hours, his *song in the house of his pilgrimage a.* By this book he wishes to direct his conduct in all the duties of private, family, and public worship; in all his social intercourses and worldly businesses; in all his demeanour towards superiors and inferiors; in all the relations of a parent, a child, a brother, a friend, a master, and a servant. He takes this book, he kisses it, and devoutly prays, with the psalmist—*O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes b!*

Thus have we considered *the various uses* to which the word of God is to be applied.—The improvement of this subject

a Psal. cxix. 54. *b* Psal. cxix. 5.

must be deferred to a future opportunity. Permit me in the mean while to make two or three Reflections on what has now been said.

(1.) The view we have taken of *the use and intent of the holy Scriptures*, possesses us of a further evidence of their divinity.

No impartial person can deny that the Bible tends to promote the general interests of mankind, and to make individuals holy and happy. By whom then could it be written? Not by wicked men surely, whose character and views are in direct opposition to its doctrines and precepts. Nor by Satan the avowed enemy both of God and man. To heaven therefore we must look for its author. *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God.* How plain and convincing this reasoning! especially to those who not only read but enter into the spirit of the Scripture. You, Christians, having been enlightened, comforted, and in your measure sanctified by this blessed book, have *the witness in yourselves*, as the apostle John expresses it *a*. And in language similar to that of the Samaritans *b* you say, "Now we believe, not merely because of their saying who have read this book and received it, as divine, but because we have ourselves examined it, and are convinced by the united force of external and internal evidence that it is of God."

(2.) Let me beseech you to be thankful to God for this inestimable gift.

Men may have the Bible in their hands without feeling any gratitude to God for it in their hearts. The reason is because they have never put it to its proper use, or having now and then glanced their eye upon it, are little profited by its instructions. But they who by their own happy experience have found the Bible to be what we have represented it, cannot be wholly strangers to the warm and pleasant feelings of a grateful heart. Do what you can, my friends, to promote those feelings. They will be pleasing to God and beneficial to yourselves. Think of your obligations not only to divine providence for putting the Scriptures into your hands, but to the Holy Spirit for setting them home on your hearts. How many

a 1 John v. 10. *b* John iv. 42.

have read this book with the utmost indifference, if not with disgust and contempt! to them it has proved *a savour of death unto death a.* Deplorable case! Has it been otherwise with you? Has it enlightened, quickened, and comforted you? Give *thanks unto God who causeth* you *to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge* in your hearts *b.*

(3.) Go on to use the word of God with that attention and devotion which its excellence and utility, as well as its divine authority, demand.

You have *found* the heavenly manna *and ate it, and it has been the joy and rejoicing of* your *hearts c.* Of this rich and pleasant food there is a large supply. It is daily showered around your tents. Go out morning and evening and gather it up. And, Oh! beware lest the abundance you enjoy and the ease with which you procure it, should prove the unhappy occasion of your treating it, like the perverse Israelites, as light bread. Partake of it with growing appetite and increasing delight. And let it ever be your concern to employ the strength you derive from it, in active exertions for the glory of God and the good of your fellow-creatures. So may you hope ere long to arrive at the promised land, where instead of the manna on which you subsisted in the wilderness, you shall be fed with angel's food, and drink of rivers of pleasure that flow at the right hand of God for evermore.

a 2 Cor. ii. 16. *b* Ver. 14. *c* Jer. xv. 16.

DISCOURSE V.

THE OBJECTIONS OF UNBELIEVERS SHEWN TO BE FUTILE AND GROUNDLESS.

2 TIM. III. 16, 17.—*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

WE have enquired into the meaning of the phrase *all scripture*, and shewn by what rules we are to be guided, and by what evidence determined, in fixing the canon of Scripture.—We have explained the import of the term *inspiration*.—We have *proved that the scriptures* of the Old and New Testament *are inspired* of God.—And we have discoursed of the true and proper *use* of this sacred book.—And it will be our business now,

V. To direct you to the right improvement of these important truths. To which end I propose to illustrate the following conclusions from the points we have established,

FIRST, "That the objections urged by unbelievers against the authenticity and divinity of the Bible, are futile and groundless;"

SECONDLY, "That the Bible is infinitely preferable to all other pretended revelations;"

THIRDLY, "That being divinely inspired, it is a test by which all opinions in religion ought to be tried and finally determined;"

FOURTHLY, "That it shall surmount all opposition, and effectually attain the great ends of its publication;"

FIFTHLY, "That it should not be withheld from the laity;" and,

SIXTHLY, "That it demands the most serious and attentive regards from all who possess it."

FIRST, It follows from the facts stated and proved, "That the objections urged by infidels against the authenticity and divinity of the Bible, are futile and groundless."—These objections it may be proper to take some notice of, and consider the replies which the argument we have so largely discussed furnishes.

1. It has been said by some that "a revelation from God is impossible." And why? "Because," say they, "there is no medium by which it can be proved: for, it being a matter of authority, all appeal to reason must be set aside, and there neither is nor can be sufficient positive testimony to prove it *a*."

But it clearly appears from what you have heard, that these assertions are false. The idea of a revelation from God being founded on authority, does not preclude an appeal to reason: nor do the Scriptures any where forbid an appeal to it upon the question before us.

Our reason is indeed weak and fallible, so that we often err, and in matters too of great importance. It however clearly teaches, that there is a God, and that we stand in need of further intimations of his will than nature alone can furnish. Upon these grounds we may safely put the following questions to the man, whose understanding is not darkened to the most extreme degree by prejudice and passion, Whether it is not possible for that God who first lighted up reason in the mind of man, to communicate to it further light? Whether such light is not greatly to be desired? Whether his deigning to communicate it would in the least contradict our natural notions of his moral perfections? And, since he exercises great patience and mercy towards guilty men, Whether it is not highly probable he will do it? To these questions he would answer in the affirmative.

So much admitted, we might venture to put the Bible into his hands, and without hesitation appeal to his reason on the holy and useful tendency of this book. And however he should here meet with discoveries he little expected, and some of them above his full and clear comprehension, I may be bold to add that he would not on this account conclude that it could

a Tindal, Collins, Toland, &c.

not come from God. He would on the contrary admit, that the very idea of a revelation from God implies information upon matters not discoverable by the mere light of nature. Upon the questions then of the possibility and probability of a divine revelation, you see there is an appeal to reason.

And an appeal there is to reason too upon the question of testimony. As extraordinary discoveries are here made respecting the nature and will of God, so we affirm that extraordinary attestations are given to the divinity of this book. To deny that such attestations can be given, is in other words to assert that miracle and prophecy are both impossible. And if so, What kind of being must God be? Nor does it at all help the matter to say, that though miracle and prophecy might be possible, yet there is no possible way of satisfying us as to the reality of either; for this is as unreasonable a limitation of the almighty power of God as the former *a*. And if you recollect what was said in a former discourse concerning the credibility of the gospel-history, and the fulfilment of scripture-predictions from their delivery down to the present time, you will see that the attestations given to the divine authority of the Bible are of such a kind, as that to reject them is the greatest of all absurdities. For the rejection of them goes to the rejection of all proof from *testimony* and *experience*, in matters unusual and marvellous; and so tends to the utter extermination of all improvements in science. Yea, it will carry us, if pursued, to the utmost length of scepticism, that of questioning our own existence.—Thus you see how totally groundless the first grand objection of infidels is, that a revelation from God is impossible, or, which is much the same thing, that there can be no satisfactory proof of it.—The next objection we shall take notice of, as having received an answer from what you have heard in the former discourses, is,

2. "The Bible's not being a universal revelation." "If," say unbelievers, "God grants a revelation of his will, it is to be expected that all should enjoy it alike; whereas the revelation

a See this argument treated in a judicious and masterly manner by Dr. Campbell, Principal of the Marischal College, Aberdeen, in his "Dissertation on Miracles, in answer to Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles."

you speak of is confined to a very few." But to this it is replied,

First, The fact as stated is not true.

For though the Bible is in the hands of but few comparatively speaking, yet its contents are more generally circulated than is commonly apprehended. The great outlines of the gospel, respecting the mercy of God to penitent sinners through the Mediator, were made known to the ancient patriarchs, and by them communicated not only to their immediate descendents, but to the Gentile nations. Melchizedeck, Job, and others were in possession of these leading truths, and no doubt published them abroad in the world. Not can we well account for the early use of sacrifices, and the notion that every where prevailed of a future state, without tracing the one and the other back to this source. And it is no unnatural conjecture, that all the other doctrines and rites which prevailed in the pagan world, were either corruptions of the true religion or additions to it; in the same manner as the erroneous doctrines and rites of the Romish church, are certainly known to be corruptions of primitive Christianity. The heathens in very early times became vain in their imaginations; but deformed as their religious worship was, it retained certain striking lineaments of truths which came originally from God. And this idea is capable of being improved into a strong collateral evidence of some leading doctrines of Christianity, which too many have endeavoured, by an unnatural force put upon language, to expunge from their Bible.

Besides all this, it is to be remembered that the world in general hath reaped many advantages both civil and moral, as we have before shewn, from the writings of Moses and the prophets, and in latter times from those of Christ and his apostles; without men's knowing the sources whence they were derived. So that divine revelation is not restricted within the narrow limits that some would represent. But admitting,

Secondly, That the Bible is, comparatively speaking, but in few hands, it does not from thence follow that it is not divine.

All men have abused their reason, and are become guilty before God. By what dictate then of natural religion is God obliged to grant to any of them, thus circumstanced, further means of knowledge and happiness? And if he does grant these to some, how does it from thence follow that he is obliged to afford them to all.

It may be difficult to enter into the reasons of the divine conduct, in bestowing a greater abundance of the good things of this life on some than others; in separating the Jewish nation to the enjoyment of peculiar privileges civil and religious, while other nations were permitted to wander on in the thick mazes of ignorance and sin; and in securing the final salvation of a part of the human race, while the rest are suffered to perish in their guilt. But it does not follow from the difficulty of accounting for these facts, that therefore they are not true, any more than from the difficulty of accounting for the origin of moral evil, that therefore there is no such thing as moral evil. Upon the same principle then we may reason, that the limiting an extraordinary revelation from heaven to a part of mankind, is no argument against the existence and divine authority of such a revelation; unless it can be proved that all mankind have a just claim upon God for it, or that he has no right to dispose of his favours as he sees fit. You see therefore that this objection against the Bible as a divine revelation, proceeds upon a principle as absurd as it is manifestly impious.—The next objection urged against the divinity of the Bible is,

3. "The peculiarity and abstruseness of some of its doctrines."

Here it is to be observed, that the greater part by far of its contents is confessedly free from this objection. Its leading doctrines are no way abstruse or mysterious, such as the existence of God, the universal dominion of providence, the immutability and eternal obligation of the divine law, the mercy of God to penitent sinners, and a future state of retribution. These are points level to the understanding of the most illiterate peasant. And the like is true with respect to the histories, precepts, and promises of the Bible.

It is acknowledged indeed that some of its doctrines are sublime, above the full comprehension of the human mind, and of which in all probability we should have had no idea, if they had not been made known by a revelation from heaven. But this is no presumptive argument against the truth of the Bible: the reverse will on examination be found to be the case. The unity, immensity, and eternity of God; the attribution of true and proper deity to the Father, Son, and Spirit; the union of deity with humanity; the dispensation of pardon and eternal life to men through the propitiatory sacrifice and mediation of the Son of God; the indispensable necessity of a divine operation on their hearts, in order to their final happiness; their amenableness as reasonable beings at the divine tribunal, and the resurrection of the body; these are points, or rather facts, which the Bible asserts in the most clear, plain, and unequivocal manner. Nor can it be denied that it is beyond the power of human reason fully to explain the modus of these facts, and their reconcileableness with each other. But it does not follow from thence that the book which asserts them is not divine.

Could it indeed be proved that these propositions involve in them a contradiction; or that the mind can frame no idea at all of the facts thus reported; or that their being told us answers no important practical purpose; there would in either of these cases be an insurmountable objection against the divine authority of the book that affirms them. But there is no truth in either of these allegations. As to the first, The Bible no where asserts a contradiction. I cannot believe that any being is and is not at the same time: but I can believe that an infinite being may exist after a manner, which if it were asserted of a finite being would be an absolute contradiction. As to the second, There is not one of the propositions just mentioned but I have a clear idea of, though I cannot tell you how these things are, or find out the clue by which they are to be reconciled. And as to the third supposed case, it is equally inapplicable to the matter before us. I plainly perceive the importance of being informed of these facts, though the modus of their existence is mysterious.

All the objection then that is to be urged against a book that affirms these facts, lies in the difficulty of accounting for them. But this is no valid objection at all. For if no fact is to be credited, how competent soever the testimony may be, unless I can fully account for it, many useful experiments in natural philosophy must be rejected, and with them a thousand other facts which all mankind acknowledge to be true. But in the case before us, the presumption against the truth of the Bible on account of the abstruseness of some of its doctrines, is more than balanced by the following plain reasons obvious to every one's understanding.

It is, *first* of all, most natural to conclude that if God deigns to give an extraordinary revelation of his will, he means to inform us of what we could not know without it. That the discoveries should be sublime and marvellous is no other than might be expected. Would he send an angel from heaven to convince an obstinate fool that two and two make four? Would he send a host of angels from heaven, to inform men of what they might easily come to the knowledge of by the right use of their faculties? No. Something strange, marvellous, immensely grand and magnificent was naturally to be expected. The presumption here therefore is in favour of what is perversely obtruded upon us as an objection.

It is, *secondly*, to be remembered, that as the matters here discoursed of are in their own nature infinitely sublime and glorious, so the human understanding is not competent to a full investigation of them: yea more than this, its natural and regular exertions are often obstructed and contravened by depraved passions and prejudices. So that difficulties are frequetly thrown in the way of our reasoning about divine truths, by pride and sensuality; difficulties that would not otherwise exist.

To this it is to be added, *thirdly*, that *that* supreme authority which grants an extraordinary revelation, has an unquestionable right to claim implicit credit to its testimony in every matter, however inexplicable at present, which does not amount to a direct absurdity or contradiction.

Abraham is commanded to offer up his son Isaac. He has

clear positive proof that it is the will of God. To that proof he is not to oppose the difficulty of reconciling the command with his own feelings, or with those dictates of natural religion which he could not renounce. He is to believe that they are reconcilable, though at present he cannot tell how: and so he is to obey. *Against hope he believed in hope—and staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God a.*

In like manner here, if the reason of the matter proposed to our faith were perfectly clear and demonstrative, we should assent to the proposition upon its own evidence, not the positive testimony of God. But if it be inexplicable, yet if God affirms it, it is most reasonable that we should on that ground yield a full assent to it. And the greater the struggle is in admitting the divine testimony, through the undue influence of prejudice and passion, the greater proof we give of our piety in surmounting that opposition. It follows then, that if there were no other end to be answered by holding up to our view those sublime discoveries before mentioned, than the trial of our piety towards God, it were a very important one.

But it is to be further observed, *fourthly*, that those peculiarities of the Bible, however abstruse, are its distinguishing glories, and are made known for purposes most beneficial to mankind. Something more was necessary to rouse men from the deep slumbers of sin, and to impel them to the duties of piety, goodness, and temperance, than a mere republication of the law of nature. If the only business were to tell men, a little louder than their reason had told them before, that God is merciful; and to point out to them their duty somewhat more clearly than they had been used to conceive of it, it would have been a problem at least whether a revelation were necessary to those ends.

But a revelation, such as that in the Bible, brought forward in a manner so stupendously grand and magnificent, not by the mediation of prophets or angels only but that of the Son of God; may well be supposed to have that in the bosom of it, which is as marvellously divine and glorious as the evidence by

a Rom. iv. 18, 20.

which it is attested. And whoever attentively revolves the truths just mentioned, must see how wonderfully they are adapted to touch every spring of the human soul, and to bring about a revolution in the character of apostate man, infinitely honourable to God, beneficial to society, and important to himself.

And thus you see that the objection urged against the Bible, on account of "the sublimity and abstruseness of some of its doctrines," has no weight at all in it, but may rather be converted into a presumptive evidence of its divinity.

4. The next objection to be replied to, respects "matters merely circumstantial," upon some of which however no small stress has been laid. If then it be enquired,

First, "Why was not this revelation given, in one entire code, at the beginning of time?" the answer is, it could not in the nature of the thing be.

The appearance and death of the Messiah was the great event upon which, as a hinge, the whole scheme of divine providence respecting the salvation of apostate men turned. The time fixed for it was of all others the fittest. Till it was accomplished the canon of Scripture could not be closed. And previous to its accomplishment the light advanced in such a gradual progression, as best suited the state and character of the Gentile and Jewish world, prepared the way for the coming of Christ, afforded increasing evidence of his divine mission, and added the most distinguishing glory to the grand event of his death.

When the sun of primeval innocence and happiness set, the morning star of revelation quickly arose, a new day dawned, and the light thus opening, increased by happy degrees through the patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, till it attained its utmost splendour in the Christian era, and so rendered all further revelations unnecessary.

The idea therefore of the Bible's consisting of broken unconnected fragments, is totally groundless. It is a book whose several parts form one entire and perfect system of the administration of providence and grace in the affairs of this world,

from the beginning to the end of time. And can any thing, I ask, be more grand and noble?

Secondly, "The characters and failings of the writers of the Bible, and other eminent persons here discoursed of," have been often urged as objections to its divine authority: but with how little success will upon a moment's recollection appear.

It is no imputation surely upon the wisdom, goodness, or power of God, to communicate his will to us through men of like passions with ourselves, and raise up some of them from the lowest rank and condition of life. What if he put a sceptre into the hand of a shepherd, pour the holy oil of prophecy on an herdsman, and call fishermen to the dignified office of apostles and ambassadors! Who shall object? What symptom is there in such conduct of imprudence, unkindness, or weakness?

Were these men indeed destitute of probity, benevolence, and piety, their divine mission, amidst all their pretensions to extraordinary powers, might well be suspected. The claims of Mohammed, when contrasted with his bloody wars and soul debaucheries, lose all their force with an unprejudiced and thoughtful mind. Not such the character exhibited to our view in the Bible. These were holy men of God. While they appealed to miracles the most stupendous for the divinity of their mission, they silently submitted the question respecting the uprightness and disinterestedness of their views to the sentence both of friends and enemies, who were intimately acquainted with their actions. The general course of their lives, distinguished not merely by purity of manners but the most generous exertions and painful sufferings, put their sincerity beyond the reach of suspicion.

Yet they were not without their imperfections, failings, and sins: nor are these concealed, excused, or palliated. Be they therefore what they may, the frank open manner in which they are related, secures the Bible from the most distant imputation of countenancing sin. But whoever narrowly examines the faults of these men of God, which have been loaded with the most malicious censure by the sons of infidelity, will see that

none of them go to the proof of a wicked and unprincipled heart. The reverse was the character of a Jacob, a David, and a Peter, who of all others have been treated with the most freedom. And as the general tenor of these men's lives establishes their integrity and piety beyond a doubt, so the ingenuous sorrow they felt and expressed for sins into which they were precipitated by temptation, will not fail to disarm every prejudice of resentment, except that of deep-rooted infidelity. And now what becomes of this boasted argument against the divine authority of Scripture? Again,

Thirdly, "Certain historical facts here related, such as those of Balaam, Samson, and the like," have been treated as idle romantic tales, which none but weak and bigotted people could credit.

But the general answer to this objection, without entering into a particular examination of the facts referred to, is such as fully establishes their probability and authenticity, while it fails not to reflect dishonour on the objector. For whoever considers the usages of eastern countries, which differ greatly from those among us; the characters too and manners of ancient times, as drawn by some of the earliest pagan writers; the relation which the facts animadverted upon bear to the general thread of the story; and above all, the manifest utility and importance of an extraordinary interference of Providence on those occasions; whoever, I say, takes these considerations into view will at once see, that the ridicule with which these facts are treated, owes all its force to a total ignorance of antiquity, and a puerile attachment to modern customs and manners. Let any one, for instance, read Homer with attention, and he will not only find his difficulties on these subjects instantly vanish, but will derive from the similarity between the usages there mentioned and those of the same age in the Bible, a strong presumptive evidence in favour of the truth of Scripture history.

And I must not omit here to observe, that the connection between sacred and profane history from the beginning down to the Christian era, is such as affords a most illustrious and irrefragable proof of the authenticity of the Old Testament

scriptures. Some questions of a chronological kind may be started which we have not lights sufficient to solve, they are however few and of trifling importance.

From hence also I am naturally led to observe, that if the transcribers of ancient copies of the Bible were guilty of some mistakes, here and there dropping a letter, or misplacing a word (which indeed if it had not happened would have been marvellous); yet we may affirm upon the most respectable authority, that those mistakes are not so numerous as might naturally be expected, nor do they affect the essential truths of Christianity. So that upon the whole this venerable book's having escaped those errors, defalcations, and interpolations which most other books have suffered, is itself little less than a miracle.—Once more,

Fourthly, As to "the form in which the Bible is written," little has been objected on this subject deserving of notice.

It should however be observed, that the mode which infinite Wisdom has chosen for the communication of divine knowledge, is admirably adapted to the various characters, capacities, and conditions of mankind. The sacred writings consist of histories, prophecies, and doctrines. The several truths reducible to one or other of these heads, are not cast into the form of a system, but brought forward to view in such manner as best suited the occasion of their delivery: now in sermons, then in dialogues; now in proverbs and parables, then in psalms, hymns, and other devotional exercises; now in occasional hints and reflections, and then in set discourses or familiar epistles; but always in a mode the most natural, pleasing, and instructive. The style is sometimes sublime and elevated, and sometimes plain and simple; but ever in perfect unison with the nature of the subject, the peculiar cast of the writer, and the particular occasion or other circumstances of the discourse.

Thus much observed, it is sufficient to add that the exceptions of unbelievers on these subjects are some of them trifling, and without any foundation in true criticism; and that others are owing to the want of reflecting, that the simplicity of the sacred writings is their glory, and that it is beneath the dignity of a divine revelation to address the passions of men by the

arts of human eloquence, where its only object is to inform and convince by the energy of plain truth.

Here then we shall close our reply to the objections urged by infidels against the authenticity and divinity of the Bible. We have seen,—That the pretended impossibility of a divine revelation, or, which is much the same, of our having sufficient evidence of its coming from God, is totally without foundation; —That its not being universal, which is in one sense false, though in another true, derogates not at all from its authority; —That the peculiarity and abstruseness of some of its doctrines is an insufficient objection: for that by far the greater part of its contents is level to the plainest understanding; and that what there is of difficulty in conceiving of some of its truths, goes not to the proof of absurdity, but is owing to the sublimity of those extraordinary discoveries it makes; to which therefore our assent is demanded upon the ground of evidence suited to their nature.—And we have also seen, That those objections which respect matters merely circumstantial, such as, —that this revelation was not given to mankind, in one entire code, at the beginning of time—that the writers, and most eminent characters of it, had their imperfections and failings— that certain historical facts here related are scarce credible— that there is a difficulty in solving some questions of a chronological kind—that transcribers have been guilty of mistakes— that the form in which this book is written, the manner in which its leading truths are brought forward to view, and its style, are in some instances exceptionable; these objections, so far as they may be supposed to have any weight in them to invalidate the truth of Scripture, we have shewn to be futile and groundless.

And now I should proceed to consider our other conclusions from the points established in the preceding discourses—"That the Bible is infinitely preferable to all other revelations;"— "That it is a test by which all opinions in religion are to be tried and determined;"—"That it shall surmount all opposition, and effectually attain the great ends of its publication;"—"That it should not be withheld from the people;"—And "that the most important regards are due to it from those who possess it,"

But these heads of improvement must be referred to the consideration of the next Sermon, and this closed with a few reflections on what has now been delivered.

(1.) How much is the folly and impiety of unbelievers to be lamented!

What are men doing when setting up their reason in opposition to revelation?—racking their invention for arguments to disprove the plainest truths?—planting their puny artillery against the battlements of heaven?—and attempting to put out the sun with the glimmering light of what they call natural religion? How great the folly, to dictate to supreme wisdom!—the madness to limit almighty power!—and the baseness, to treat the noblest gift of heaven not only with indifference but contempt! Can a man look around him and consider the calamities which befal the human race, trace them back to sin their true source, and feel his own guilt, helplessness, and misery; and at the same time offer violence to the kind arm stretched forth to his relief? He cannot. Would you then have an explanation of this wonderful phænomenon —infidelity? You must look, not to any failure in the evidence of Christianity, but to inattention to notorious facts, to ignorance of the human heart, to a base subjection to sordid passions, and to insensibility to the noblest.

What harm has the Bible done that it should be treated as an enemy—guarded against with suspicion, and opposed with malice? Why should that noble simplicity which marks every page of its contents, be violated by the lawless hands of insult and ridicule? Why should the concern here shewn to reconcile the claims of justice with the pleas of mercy, be deemed weakness and folly? Why should *the Son of God be trodden under foot, and the blood of the covenant counted an unholy thing a?* Why, in a word, should the earnest and affectionate expostulations of this book on men's present and everlasting interests, be laughed at as the mere effusions of enthusiasm, or the assumed grimace of hypocrisy? Evidence there is enough of the miserable depravity of the human heart in the daily conduct of thousands towards their Maker, their fellow-

a Heb. x. 29.

creatures, and themselves: but the extreme to which it is capable of being carried would perhaps not have been imagined, if there had been no Bible and no infidelity. Let such take heed lest that befal them which befel the unbelieving Israelites, of whom it is said, *Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the council of the Most High: therefore he brought down their heart with labour, they fell down and there was none to help a.*

(2.) Let us not be offended at free enquiry.

Every man has an undoubted right to judge of the authenticity, meaning, and intrinsic value of this, or any other book, put into his hands. To deny him that right is absurd. To throw any difficulties in the way of his exercising it, whether by menaces civil or ecclesiastical, is insufferable tyranny. Yea, I will add, such principles and conduct are as irreconcileable with policy as with equity. The real friend of revelation will earnestly recommend it to every man to read this book with attention, and to judge for himself of its contents, not doubting but the event of the severest scrutiny, if impartial, will be conviction. If he who enters the lists with another at single combat, intimates a wish that his adversary were manacled or deprived of any one advantage common to both, he may be fairly pronounced beaten before he begins the attack. And it affords no small pleasure to an intelligent Christian to reflect, that whatever discouragements may have been thrown in the way of free enquiry in other countries, it hath little cause for complaint in this. No *index expurgatorius*, no *inquisitory process*, no *anathema ex cathedra*, is to be dreaded in our happy land.

And what has been the effect of this lenity?—lenity I call it, because how clearly soever the civil and religious rights of mankind may be ascertained and demonstrated, they have often been overawed and restrained by authority. What, I say, has been the effect of the freedom which this country has enjoyed? The pens of infidels in great abundance have been drawn against the Scriptures. Every objection that wit or malice could suggest has been brought forward to the view

a Psal. cvii. 11, 12.

of the world, sometimes in the way of open attack, and sometimes under the insidious form of tenderness if not friendship for this sacred book. But has the Bible sustained any real damage from these assaults? It has not. Like a mighty oak it has stood unmoved, suffering nothing from the noisy wind but the mere rustling of its leaves. Yea, the cause of truth has been availed by these attacks. For they have given birth to such defences of Christianity, as have effectually removed the doubts of sincere enquirers, and at once reflected honour on their authors, and confusion on their opponents.

(3.) That freedom of enquiry which we allow to others let us diligently and conscientiously use ourselves. *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life a.* Read the sacred records with attention. Endeavour to come at their true meaning. Take nothing upon trust. See with your own eyes. Allow to every objection its full force. Let the balance be held with an impartial and steady hand. Call in all the aid you can get. And humbly sensible of your liableness to err, make it your daily and most earnest prayer to God, to assist your understanding and judgment, to secure you from the influence of prejudice and passion, and to lead you into all truth.

And while I thus exhort you, my friends, to measures which right reason and conscience cannot but approve, permit me to represent to you, with great seriousness and affection, the infinite importance of your possessing a further evidence of the divinity of the Scriptures—an evidence of which it will not be in the power of sophistry, contempt, or persecution to deprive you. It is what arises from that savour or relish for the great truths of the Bible, which, mingling itself with your meditations, enquiries, reasonings, intercourses with others, and your prayers to God; will cheer your spirits, fortify your hearts, and make you invulnerable to the attacks of infidelity.

Believe me, the Bible was not given us for the trifling purposes of amusement, criticism, or disputation. It was put into our hands for ends infinitely more important; to inform our

a John v. 39.

understandings, convince our consciences, deliver us from the dominion of sin, and inspire us with the love of God, contempt of the world, and the joyful hope of a blessed immortality. Oh! did we enter into the spirit of our religion, though like David unused to the cumberous armour of boasting combatants, we went out only with our scrip and our sling against the enemy; we should not fail to lay the proud Philistine in the dust—the Philistine who dares defy the armies of the living God. With this *witness in ourselves a*, and the seasonable aids of divine grace, we should be nobly superior to the contemptuous sneers of unbelievers, and the united force of all the powers of darkness: we should neither be laughed out of our profession by the former, nor be terrified into a desertion of it by the latter.—I shall only add,

(4.) And lastly, That it should be our solicitous concern, to adorn our Christian profession with the pleasant and substantial fruits of love and obedience.

Doubtless there have been many of the opposite description among the professors of religion. But no considerate man will affirm, that their conduct can with any reason be improved into an argument against the divinity of the Bible. Truth is always the same. The only inference that can with justice be drawn from it is, that such unhappy persons are not the men they pretend to be. And indeed it is tremendous to think how awful their condemnation will be in the great day of account! But it should be observed, on the other hand, that there are innumerable instances of those in whose lives the holy tendency of the gospel is strikingly realized. And if it be true, as it most certainly is, that *the grace of God teaches men to live righteously, soberly, and godly in the world b*, it is also true that many in all ages have not only learned but practised this doctrine.

As however the considerations of the ill lives of some professing Christians has been, contrary to all reason, pressed into the service of infidelity, and as it may become an occasion of confirming thoughtless people in their sloth and stupidity, we are under the greater obligation to pay a circumspect attention

a 1 John v. 10. *b* Tit. ii. 12.

to our external conduct. Indeed it is inconceivable how a man of religion can live in a course of sin: were he so to do he would act against the habitual sense and inclination of his heart; a contradiction not to be admitted. Wherefore the apostle John says, *He that is born of God sinneth not a*, "does not live in sin, does not allow himself in it." Yet good men may by the force of sudden temptation be precipitated into gross sins, and thereby *give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme b*. Be therefore, Christians, on your guard. *See you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise c*. Nor be content with preserving decent and sober characters: but let it be your concern to excel in the amiable virtues of piety, temperance, and benevolence. By all the noble motives which this book written with the finger of God suggests, be persuaded to *let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven d*.

DISCOURSE VI.

OTHER CONCLUSIONS FROM THE FACTS BEFORE STATED AND PROVED, CONSIDERED.

2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.—*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

Having considered, in some former discourses—What Scripture is—What is meant by inspiration—What proof we have that the Bible is inspired—and What is the proper use of this sacred book, we have proceeded to the improvement of

a 1 John v. 18. *b* 2 Sam. xii. 14.
c Eph. v. 15. *d* Matt. v. 16.

this important subject. To which purpose we have proposed to illustrate the following deductions from the truths before stated and proved,

FIRST, "That the objections urged by unbelievers against the authenticity and divinity of the Bible are futile and groundless;"

SECONDLY, "That the Bible is infinitely preferable to all other pretended revelations;"

THIRDLY, "That being divinely inspired it is a test by which every opinion in religion ought to be tried and finally determined;"

FOURTHLY, "That it shall surmount all opposition, and effectly attain the great ends of its publication;"

FIFTHLY, "That it ought not be withheld from the people;" and,

SIXTHLY, "That the most important regards are due to it from all who have the happiness to possess it."

The objections of infidels we have in the first place considered: and I hope you are convinced,

1. That "the pretended impossibility of a divine revelation, or, which is much the same, the impossibility of our having sufficient evidence of its coming from God," is an objection totally without foundation. You have seen,

2. That "its not being universal," which is in one sense false though in another true, does not at all derogate from its authority. You have also seen,

3. That "the peculiarity and abstruseness of some of its doctriness" is an insufficient objection: for the greater part of its contents is level to the plainest understanding; and what there is of difficulty in conceiving of some of its truths, goes not to the proof of absurdity, but is owing to the sublimity of those extraordinary discoveries it makes, to which therefore our assent is demanded upon the ground of evidence suited to their nature. And we have further shewn,

4. That all those objections which respect "matters merely circumstantial," are also groundless, such as—that this revelation was not given to mankind in one entire code, at the beginning of time—that the writers and most eminent charac-

ters of the Bible had their imperfections and failings—that certain historical facts here related are of the marvellous kind—that there are some chronological difficulties hard to be solved—that transcribers of manuscripts, and translators, have been guilty of mistakes,—that the form in which the Bible is written, the manner in which its leading truths are brought forward to view, and its style, are on some accounts exceptionable: these objections, so far as they have any the least force to invalidate the truth of Scripture, have been shewn to be futile and groundless.—And now I proceed to the second conclusion from our general argument, which is this,

SECONDLY, That "the Bible is infinitely preferable to all other revelations."

And so it must be, if that comes from God, and these are only the inventions of men. Here I shall not speak of those productions of genius and learning which have drawn the attention of all mankind, and made the fame of their authors immortal, but at the same time have no pretensions to inspiration. I mean only to bring the Bible into comparison with books which have claimed the warrant of divine authority. Of this kind are the Zend of Zoroaster; the five books of Confucius, the Chinese lawgiver; the Koran of Mohammed; the Oral-Law of the Jews, as contained in their Mishna and Targums; to which perhaps might be added the Roman Decretals.

In some of these books there are no doubt many excellent things respecting the nature, perfections, and providence of God; duties personal, domestic, and political; and a future state of retribution. But whatever there is of truth, wisdom, and sublimity in some passages of these books; it has been clearly shewn by learned men, that the writers of them were principally indebted to the Scriptures for their knowledge, and that little, comparatively speaking, is to be set down to the account of genius. Allowing however what you will to genius, there is sufficient internal evidence in each of these books, that they were not written by inspiration, and that the claims of their authors to divine authority were presumptuous and groundless. Of this no one can reasonably doubt who

impartially considers, the gross errors, the palpable falsehoods, the improbable miracles, the idle tales, and the puerile conceits which they contain, and with which they every where abound.

When therefore they are brought into competition with the Bible, they appear as contemptible as the rant of fortune-tellers when compared with the sober reasonings of sound philosophy. And indeed when stript of what is most exceptionable in them, the light they give bears no other proportion to the Bible, than that of a dim candle to the meridian glories of the sun. Let Zoroaster boast of his having forced his way into the presence of Darius through the tiling of the palace, and Mohammed of his splitting the moon; we will shew them JEHOVAH descending on Mount Sinai, in the view of a million of people, at the giving of the law; and the whole heavens covered with blackness, at the death of his Son to expiate the violations of that law. Let these eastern impostors pretend mighty zeal for the interests of mankind, while they are, on the one hand, awing them into subjection by the terrors of the sword; and on the other, drawing them into their toils by the fascinating indulgences of sense: we will shew them on the contrary the most glorious instance of benevolence imaginable, in the sacrifice of the Son of God to secure the rights of justice, and thereby at once to allure, to impel us to the practice of the purest devotion and morality.

We will hold up to the view of the whole world, truths which carry divinity on the face of them, a dignity and grandeur in their appearance infinitely surpassing the little schemes and contrivances of the most exalted human genius; truths too strange and marvellous to have entered into the mind of man, if not communicated by an immediate revelation from heaven; truths which ask no aid from without, either from the sword or the wit of man, to gain them admission to the heart: but demand our assent by their own native evidence, accompanied with a series of divine attestations the most august and stupendous.

What an incomparable book this! To compare it with others may look like degrading it, and therefore require an

apology. The bringing it however into a comparative view with other pretended revelations, will have this important effect, to fix upon our minds this further plain truth, that if our Bible is not a revelation from God, there is none at all that we know of.—To proceed,

THIRDLY, It follows from our account of the Bible, "That it is a test by which all opinions in religion are to be tried and finally determined."

This conclusion from the premises laid down in the former discourses, is so plain that to insist particularly on it may seem unnecessary. But it will be found in the sequel that there is occasion for establishing this important truth.

We say, If God is pleased to grant a revelation of his will, to men so circumstanced as we are; it is natural to expect it should contain in it every thing necessary to be known in order to our final salvation, and to guide our feet in the path that that leads to the heavenly blessedness. Such a revelation we assert is given us in the Bible, and that it is so inspired of God that we may depend upon the authenticity of its contents. All its doctrines, reasonings, precepts, promises, histories, and predictions are infallibly true. If therefore any question arises respecting the grounds of our acceptance with God, or the duty we owe him, one another, and ourselves; it is to be referred to this book, and by the sentence of it such question is to be determined. Nothing can be more plain and clear than this reasoning.

To which it must be added, that the Bible itself claims such duty from those who receive it as a divine revelation. *To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them a. Search the Scriptures,* says our Saviour, *for in them ye think ye have eternal life b. The holy Scriptures,* says the apostle to Timothy, *are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus c.* And in our text he adds, *All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

a Isa. viii. 20. *b* John v. 39. *c* 2 Tim. iii. 15.

Now from the reason and nature of the thing as we have stated it, and from these claims of the sacred writings, extended as they are to *all* Scripture, it undeniably follows, that the Bible is a test, a standard, a measure of all religious opinions. Whatever the man who diligently and impartially searches the Scriptures, is in his conscience satisfied is the sense of Scripture, that must in his idea be divine truth; and whatever is contrary to it, that must in his idea be error.

The importance of maintaining that the Scriptures are such a test is very great. It has been generally admitted by all Christians. Protestants have laid no small stress on it; and the Church of Rome has no otherwise denied it, than by insisting that, as there are in the Bible some things hard to be understood, there ought to be an infallible judge in controversies about matters of faith; to which office, without any authority from this sacred book she has raised the bishop of Rome. The principle, that whatever can be proved to be the sense of Scripture ought to control all other opinions, they admit. Their only mistake lies in arrogating to themselves an exclusive right of determining what is the meaning of Scripture, and thereby depriving others of a claim, which if not exercised, their faith is to little, if any valuable purpose at all. The Bible then we insist is an infallible test of all doctrines, the dernier resort in every controversy about religion, the tribunal from whence lies no appeal on earth. And indeed to deny this, is in effect, as we shall quickly shew, to shake the foundation on which the Bible stands.

But we have lived to see the time in which this plain truth is questioned, if not absolutely denied. There are those who admit that the Bible contains in it a revelation of the will of God, but allow not that authority to some parts of it which we have proved belongs to the whole. To the Gospels they give the preference above the Epistles, which latter they consider as the reasonings of fallible men, no farther binding than as they appear to them conclusive; which in some instances they take the liberty to tell us they do not. And indeed as to the former, the Gospels, so dissatisfied are they with some passages which occur in them, that they are disposed to cashier

them as interpolations, though without any positive proof of this so injurious a charge. And in order to weaken that idea of inspiration for which we contend, they have introduced such a distinction between *revelation, knowledge, prophecy,* and *doctrine a,* as places the three latter upon a different ground of authority from the former. So that however we are to conceive of some things told us in our Bibles as coming immediately from God, we are to consider others as submitted to our judgment whether to be received or rejected.

That this view of the Scriptures is most erroneous, clearly appears from the account given of inspiration in a former discourse, nor shall I here bring forward to your recollection the evidence there adduced. What I mean at present is only to observe, that if this hypothesis be true, the Bible at once ceases to be a test of religious opinions, all appeal to it on questions of this nature is vain and nugatory; yea more than this, there follows from hence a strong presumption against the divine authority of the whole of this book. For you easily see, if a line is not satisfactorily drawn between what we are to consider as the reasoning of God, and the reasoning of mere men (and to do this would require a new revelation from heaven); it is not possible for us to determine what part of Scripture is, and what is not a divine test. And so we are to all intents and purposes without any divine test; and of consequence reduced to the dilemma of affirming, either that God has given us a revelation that is no way decisive on the great questions it discusses, or that the Bible is no revelation from God at all.

How directly therefore this view of Scripture leads to a total renunciation of its divine authority, let any impartial person judge. The affront too which, by this statement of the matter, is put upon those *holy men of God who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost,* and I fear by consequence on the Holy Spirit himself, is such as must I think make a serious Christian tremble. Nor is this hypothesis, we may venture to affirm, less irrational and absurd than it is indecent and dishonourable. Let us therefore steadily maintain, that this book, being inspired of God, is a decisive test in every question

a 1 Cor. xiv. 6.

relative to matters of religion. Till this is admitted all dispute about the doctrines it contains is to no purpose.

But before I leave this head permit me to make one observation which I hope will not be deemed uncandid: it is this, that the pains taken to weaken and narrow the idea of divine inspiration, have an appearance at least of some apprehension, that those peculiar doctrines of Christianity for which we contend may possibly be contained in the Scriptures. For if it could be clearly made appear that these exceptionable points are not to be found in Scripture, is it imaginable that invention would be thus set on the rack, to find out such unnatural measures to get rid of them? But I forbear any further enlargement here, and proceed to our next conclusion from the general argument of the divine inspiration of the Bible, and that is,

FOURTHLY, That "it shall surmount all opposition, and effectually attain the great ends of its publication."

It was naturally to be expected that a book which reveals the mystery of redemption, and which was itself to be the main instrument of carrying that glorious design into effect, should rouse the resentment of the great enemy of mankind. This it has done. Every engine which the malice of hell could invent has been set to work, to annihilate, pervert, or conceal this book; or at least to obstruct the salutary effect of its sacred truths on the minds of men. But these measures have hitherto failed, and ever will fail, of compassing the ends proposed. *The Scriptures cannot be broken a. My word*, says the blessed God, *shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it b. Not one jot or tittle shall pass from it, till all be fulfilled c. On this rock*, that is, the revealed will of God, our Saviour *has built his church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it d.* Yea, the name by which he is himself called is, THE WORD OF GOD; and *out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, with which he shall smite* the disobedient *nations e.*

a John x. 35. *b* Isa. lv. 10, 11. *c* Matt. v. 18.
d Matt. xvi. 18. *e* Rev. xix. 13, 15.

To mark particularly the interpositions of divine providence and grace in favour of the Bible, would carry me too far into the history of past times, or I might remind you how it hath escaped the rage of pagan persecutions; how it hath eluded the artful measures of the Romish church to conceal it from the public view; how it hath triumphed over the boasted reasonings of infidelity; and how it hath secured its hold on the hearts of sincere Christians, amidst unwearied endeavours from various quarters to debase the simplicity and diminish the importance of its leading truths.

Nor is this interposition in its favour to be wondered at. A book inspired of God could not but be the constant object of his attention, protection, and support. It could not but be superior to every attack made upon it by the swords of princes, the arts of false philosophy, and the stubborn prejudices of vice and sin. The same inspired lips which have published the gospel to the world, have pronounced a solemn anathema upon him who dares pervert it, even though he were an angel from heaven *a*. It cannot therefore be doubted that the Bible, with all its important contents, will remain secure under the guardian care of Heaven to the end of time.

The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek b. Nor will it fail, wherever it comes accompanied with a divine energy, to produce the desired effect on the *vessels of mercy*, who are by these means *prepared unto glory c.* How it enlightens the understanding, convinces the conscience, comforts the heart, and renews the affections, we have shewn in a former discourse; and therefore shall only add, that as the grand promise of eternal life, so those subordinate to it—promises adapted to the different exigencies of the Christian in every stage of his profession, shall all be punctually fulfilled.

They are the promises of him who cannot lie, and are ratified by the blood of Jesus Christ his well-beloved Son. When providence frowns, fears arise, and unbelief prevails, the good man may perhaps fetch a sigh, and in the language of the psalmist say, *Hath his promise failed? Hath he forgotten to*

a Gal. i. 7, 8. *b* Rom. i. 16. *c* Rom. ix. 23.

be gracious a? But this cannot be. The very measures which seem to him scarcely reconcilable with the word of God, are operating to its accomplishment. The promises of the Bible and the events of providence are always in perfect unison. This sometimes appears to the comfort of the Christian in the present life, but every doubt on the matter shall be fully cleared up in the world to come.

Let us however be persuaded in seasons of darkness and sorrow to recur to first principles, to call in the aid of this great leading truth, that *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God*, and to yield as firm credit to its gracious declaration, as if we heard them pronounced with an audible voice from heaven. *God willing*, in this book, *more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us b.* How animating these considerations to the humble Christian, firmly persuaded of the divine authority of his Bible!

On the other hand: the sentence denounced in this book on obstinate and incorrigible sinners, shall not fail in due time of being executed. *God is not a man that he should lie, nor the Son of man that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good c?* His threatenings are not the effusions of hasty passion, but the result of wise and just counsel. The gospel is to some *a savour of death unto death d: a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence e. Whosoever shall fall on this stone, shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder f.* What awful denunciations these! Is there an obstinate offender that admits the possibility of the Bible's being an inspired book, and can avoid trembling? *Who knoweth the power of thine anger, O Lord? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath g.*—Again,

a Psal. lxxvii. 8, 9. *b* Heb. vi. 17, 18. *c* Num. xxiii. 19.
d 2 Cor. ii. 16. *e* 1 Pet. ii. 8. *f* Matt. xxi. 44.
g Psal. xc. 11.

The idea of divine inspiration casts a pleasing solemnity over the predictions of this book, relative to the future state of the church and the world. The revolutions quickly to be expected, are here described in language not easy to be decyphered at present. But the general outlines of them can scarce be mistaken. The church or the cause of truth and piety, like Zion of old, hath long sat in darkness and the shadow of death. *She* that ought to have been *great among nations, and princess among the provinces, hath become tributary. She hath wept sore in the night, and her tears are* still *on her cheeks: among her lovers she hath had* few *to comfort her*, and *her friends have dealt treacherously with her a.* But the time is approaching when it shall be said, *Arise*, O Zion, and *shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee b. Thy righteousness shall go forth as brightness, and thy salvation as a lamp that burneth. The Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and kings thy glory c.*

A mighty *angel shall fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth d.* The brightness of his countenance shall enlighten the regions of darkness, and the sentence of his lips set the captive nations at liberty. Ignorance, vice, and oppression shall flee before him; and *the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea e.* The heathen deities shall bow at the feet of Jesus of Nazareth; and the Koran fall from the hands of the false prophet, and with it the sword that gave him dominion over the deluded nations.

'The man of sin, who exalteth himself above all that is called God, sitting in the temple of God, and shewing himself that he is God;' who 'reigns over the kings of the earth,' and plants his throne on the consciences, lives, and liberties of mankind; this 'mystery of iniquity,' this 'wicked one, who hath been revealed' to the astonishment of the whole world, 'shall be consumed with the spirit of the Lord and the brightness of his coming *f*.' The scattered sons of Abraham shall be col-

a Lam. i. 1, 2. *b* Isa. lx. 1. *c* Isa. lxii. 1, 2. *d* Rev. xiv. 6, *e* Isa. xi. 9, *f* 2 Thess. ii. 3, 4, 7, 8.—Rev. xvii. 18.

lected from the remotest parts of the earth, to the standard of the once crucified but now triumphant Messiah, and henceforth become the willing followers of him whom their ancestors rejected with sovereign contempt. And so shall the mediatorial glories of the Son of God be exhibited to the view of mankind, after a manner unknown before this illustrious period. For 'the God of heaven shall set up a kingdom, which shall break in pieces and consume all the kingdoms of the earth,' but shall never itself be destroyed *a*.

At length, the designs of Providence respecting this world having been completed, 'the dead shall be raised, both small and great, stand before God, and be judged every man according to their works. So shall death and hell, and all who are not found written in the book of life, be cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death *b*.'

These predictions, accompanied with various other events, too numerous to be recited here, shall receive their exact accomplishment. And what is it that realizes these prospects, substantiates these hopes, gives certainty to these expectations? It is faith in *the holy Scriptures given by inspiration of God*.—We go on now to the

FIFTH conclusion from our general argument, That "the Bible ought on no account to be withheld from the people."

Here our business is with the Romish church, who have ever held that the Bible is a book not to be trusted in the hands of the unlearned, or the general body of the people. This opinion they ground upon the words of the apostle Peter, who speaking of the epistles of St. Paul says, *In them are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction c*. Yes, and true it is that some do wrest the Scriptures, and wrest them to their own destruction. But the conclusion drawn from thence has no force in it at all. For what useful book is there but may be abused by men of corrupt minds? And who will say that, for this reason, the productions of men of science and learning

a Dan. ii. 44. *b* Rev. xx. 12—15. *c* 2 Pet. iii. 16.

should be interdicted, and knowledge driven like a frightful spectre out of the world? The Scriptures no doubt have been abused by infidels and others. But they are not the less to be valued. Nor are they of such doubtful import, as to render the careful perusal of them at all hazardous to the plainest reader.

On the contrary, the Scriptures *are able to make men wise unto salvation a:* and *the wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err* in his walk through this path of knowledge and truth to final happiness *b*. Wherefore Christ commands the Jews *to search the Scriptures c*. And many other passages might be cited which put the question beyond a doubt, that every one has a right to the Bible who has the possible means of procuring it; yea more than this, that it is his indispensable duty to read, and use his best endeavours to understand it.

But what I mean here to shew is, that the right of the people to the Bible, is a necessary consequence of its being a revelation from God. If it was meant for the use of men of all descriptions, they certainly ought to have it. Would I send a letter to a friend, and tell him on the outside of it, that it will be to his peril to open it? No surely. Nor is there on the face of Scripture the least appearance of an exclusive right to any. However sacredly the autograph of the law might be kept in the tabernacle and in the temple afterwards, the people were not denied copies of it. Synagogues there were in which Moses and the prophets were openly read. And the books of the New Testament were evidently published for the instruction of all, and meant to be in universal circulation. Indeed a revelation from God to men manifestly involves in it the idea of general use. Concealment defeats the purpose of it, and tends directly to excite a doubt of its authenticity.

One would wonder therefore what should induce the friends of revelation, as the Romanists pretend to be, to act a part so injurious to the Bible, and to those who have so just a claim to it. The ostensible reason has been mentioned, the true reason remains to be laid open and exposed.

a 2 Tim. iii. 15. *b* Isa. xxxv. 8. *c* John v. 39.

To defeat the salutary purpose of this revelation, was the grand object of the great enemy of mankind. But this object could not be attained without concealing the Bible from the view of the people. The expedient therefore of concealment was adopted—an expedient which not a little gratified the base and avaricious views of the emissaries employed to carry it into effect. The church of Rome, upon whom the business devolved, took care with great address, to instil into the minds of men this humiliating maxim, "That ignorance is the mother of devotion." And thus preparing the way for the fraudulent trespass to be made on the rights of the people, she pretended that the Bible was committed as a sacred deposit to her care, with full powers to impose such interpretation on the contents of it as she should judge right. To persuade men to a calm submission to her will she insisted, that without the authority of such an infallible judge as herself there could be no uniformity in religion; which uniformity too was to be taken for granted as a certain note, or infallible mark of the true catholic church. And yet further to awe them into a compliance they were told, with a severe and menacing air, that it was at the peril of damnation that they meddled with this book. And thus violently wresting the key of knowledge from the people, she had a fair opportunity of palming upon them the grossest absurdities; and so of acquiring by degrees an immense fund of wealth and power, by which she was enabled to tyrannize over the western part of the world for near a thousand years.

If in this description of the Romish church we do not clearly discern the horrid features of *the Man of Sin*, as drawn in the Bible, we must surely be blind indeed. Antichrist could scarce himself avoid seeing his own countenance in this mirror, and had therefore an additional reason to slip it thus dexterously away from those, who might have therein exposed his deformed and hateful visage to public view.

God of his infinite wisdom permitted this delusion to prevail for the long period before mentioned, as a just punishment of *their* ingratitude and wickedness *who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness* [a]. The pure gospel was de-

[a] 2 Thess. ii. 12.

spised and trampled under foot. These Christians, as they called themselves, paid their court to false philosophy, and allured by her wanton charms played the truth into her hands. And having thus disfigured the beautiful simplicity of the Christian institution, blended promiscuously the civil and religious power, converted pagan temples into stately cathedrals, put the sceptre as well as the mitre into the hands of the church, and obliged sovereign princes to bow ignominiously to spiritual dominion; they laid the foundation of all that ignorance, barbarism, and horrid tyranny and persecution which obtained through the dark age.

At length, however, this winter night of darkness and delusion drew to a close, the bright sun of the Reformation arose, and the Bible, the great charter of all our rights, was restored to the hands from which it had been wrested, and with it knowledge, liberty, happiness, and every thing dear to us as men and Christians. What halcyon days these! Would to God we were sensible of the distinguished privileges we enjoy! Would to God this venerable book, to which we owe our civil as well as religious rights, were treated with that reverence and gratitude it so justly merits! But ah! how is it insulted by the scoffs of infidels on the one hand; and abused, on the other, by the forced interpretations of those, who will receive nothing from God himself as truth, which they cannot fully comprehend and clearly explain!

I have only to add here, that if the Bible has been shamefully affronted by those who have done their utmost to conceal it from public view, and by those who have used the arts of sophistry and false reasoning to lessen its authority, and explain away its natural meaning; it should be our solicitous concern to do honour to this sacred book, and to ourselves, by steadily maintaining that every man has a right to it, and a right to judge for himself what is the meaning of its contents. And we have little room to doubt, that as it was intended for the use of the meanest peasant as well as the most sagacious philosopher, so that interpretation which is most plain and natural, though attended with its difficulties, will in the end be found to be the true one.—We proceed now to shew you,

SIXTHLY, "That the Bible demands the most serious and attentive regards from all who possess it."

To impress this sentiment on your minds, I would fain exert the utmost energy of language, and all the pathos of divine passion, at the same time looking devoutly to him who indited the Scriptures, to give force and success to what I say. If the doctrine you have heard, my brethren, be true, your having this Bible in your hands will prove an occasion to you of the greatest happiness, or the greatest misery. There is no medium here. Should it be found another day, that you have rightly improved this boon bestowed on you by indulgent Heaven, your joy will be unspeakably great; if otherwise, it had been better for you that you had never been born. Pagans will rise up in judgment against you. A Socrates, who felt the galling yoke of a depraved nature, and sighed for deliverance; who wished and hoped for the time when a divine teacher, then shrouded from his view by a dark and impenetrable cloud, would burst forth in his glory and shed light over a miserable world *a*; a Socrates, I say, will stand forth and applaud the sentence that sinks you into everlasting perdition. It cannot be that God should give men a written revelation of his will, and not call them to an account for their improvement or abuse of it. I have proved the Bible to be a revelation from God, deny the consequence if you can. Tell me then,

(1.) Will ye not read this book?

Were a friend to send you a letter from a remote part of the globe, duly directed and sealed, would you not open it and read it? Were the messenger that brought it to assure you, that it contained news of the last importance to your welfare; that the writer of it had procured treasures for you of immense value, and at an expence not to be computed; that he wished to make you happy; that whereas there had been a difference between him and you, he was disposed to make it up; and that he desired no other return for his generosity than that your future temper and conduct might be governed by the salutary advice here given you; were he to tell you all this, when he put

a See what Socrates says in the close of his discourse with Alcibiades concerning prayer.

the letter into your hand, would you, I ask, carelessly throw it aside without once looking into it? It is scarce imaginable.—Or if you were capable of acting such a part, would he not charge you with treating him as an impostor?—Or if that were denied, and his integrity admitted, would he not go away sighing, and pronounce you insane? He would.

And is not your conduct who thus treat the word of God exactly similar to that I have been representing? Is not, I may add, the ingratitude, and danger of it, immensely greater? The Bible is put into your hands. You are told in general the contents of it, and are earnestly solicited to read it. Yet you carelessly throw it aside, thrust it from you even while you admit its truth, or, if you have any doubts, yet possess the means of removing them. To what is such conduct to be imputed but insanity, idiotism, or the most criminal depravity? Is any thing to be said in your excuse? Can you offer any thing in your own excuse? A day of reckoning will come. And think you a God of justice, whose mercy has been thus abused, will not publicly resent such base ingratitude? He will whet his glittering sword, and his hand will lay hold on vengeance. *Bring hither*, he will say, *these mine enemies, who would not that I should reign over them, and slay them before me a.*

But it is not merely from a contemptuous treatment of the Bible that I would dissuade you.—Beware, I entreat you, of any the least approach to that cold indifference with which this book is received by too many who call themselves Christians. Something more is required of you than a general regard to it. It will be to little purpose that you cast your eye now and then upon it, to silence the remonstrances of conscience, or to gratify vain curiosity. It is your duty, your indispensable duty,

(2.) To read it with the utmost care and attention.

If it has the divine signature upon it, as we have clearly proved it has, you cannot pay a too serious and solemn attention to it. Read, under the idea of its coming from God, you will be anxious to enter into the true meaning and spirit of it. You will not treat it as a school boy does his task. You will not run over it with the indifference a Jew does his prayers, or

a Luke xix. 27.

a Mohammedan his Koran. You will read it regularly, at stated seasons, in such portions and in such order as will best enable you to come at its genuine purport and intention. You will study it, consider it in its connection, apply it to yourself, compare it with the feelings of your own heart, with the observations you daily make upon mankind, and events which are continually rising to your view. You will read it not merely for your amusement, but for *reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness.* You will read it with the solemnities of death, judgment, and eternity before your eyes. You will read it upon your knees, fervently beseeching God to take away the veil of prejudice from your eyes, to hold up divine truth to your mental sight in its native simplicity and glory, and to bless you with all the meekness and teachableness of a child at the knee of its instructor. You will read it, in fine, with a firm resolution, in a dependance on divine grace, to form your temper and practice by it.

And now, is not this advice such as naturally and necessarily arises out of the idea of Scripture as a book divinely inspired? I appeal to your judgment and conscience. Can you be excused from paying this so serious and solemn an attention to it, by any one consideration of prudence, decency, or common sense? On the contrary, justice, truth, gratitude, interest, must, if you are not fast bound in the chains of prejudice and infatuation, urge you to your duty. Why, O why, shall *Wisdom cry*, and *Uunderstanding put forth her voice*, and you *refuse while she thus calls*, and *not regard while she thus stretches forth her hand a?* What will be the sad result should you go on obstinately to resist her intreaties? She will in the day of your extremity *laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh b.* But I hope better things of you, things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak.

Let us all be thankful to God for this inestimable gift of his holy word. Let us make it the man of our counsel; read it by day, and meditate upon it by night; *hide it in our hearts, that we may not sin against God c;* resort with pleasure to the place where its doctrines, precepts, and promises are by di-

a Prov. viii. 1. i. 24. *b* Ver. 26. *c* Psal. cxix. 11.

vine appointment explained, enforced, and illustrated; read it in our families and to our servants; circulate it to the utmost of our power among our brethren of mankind, and attract their attention to it by the sweetness of our tempers and the purity of our lives.

DISCOURSE VII.

THE DUTY WHICH CHRISTIANS OWE TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

COL. III. 16.—*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,*——.

WE have discoursed largely on the divine authority and various use of the holy Scriptures. We have earnestly exhorted men of every description, into whose hands this book comes, to treat it with that reverence and attention which its truth and importance demand. But there remains something yet to be done, and that is, to assist the sincere Christian with some seasonable advice on the interesting question, How he may best use this book to the salutary purpose of his instruction, edification, and comfort? To which end I have chosen the words just read.

The phrase of *the word of Christ* may be understood either restrictively, of the discourses he himself delivered during his personal ministry here on earth; or more largely, of the holy Scriptures in general.

Our Saviour's sermons on various occasions, and to numerous auditories; his familiar discourses with the apostles and other intimate friends; and his answers to the captious questions of his enemies, with the reproofs that accompanied them, are particularly and accurately reported by the Evangelists.

These ought therefore to be frequently read, diligently considered, and carefully treasured up in our memories; for surely *no man ever spake like him a*. The truths he delivered were most important, no less interesting to us than to his immediate disciples. Nor was the manner of his delivering them a circumstance unworthy of either their or our notice.

A friend of Jesus must feel pleasure in figuring to himself the person, the voice, the attitude of Christ, and every other matter related concerning his public preaching and private discourses. If the men of Nazareth, stupid as they were, *fastened their eyes upon him* as he spake, *and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth b*; how delighted must the Christian be while in his meditations, mingling with the multitude, he gazes upon the countenance, and hangs upon the lips of his divine Master! *The friend of the bridegroom*, says John the Baptist, *which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice*: and he adds, *this my joy is fulfilled c*. So may the Christian express himself in hours of extraordinary devotion. Yea, some good men in a kind of ecstacy have cried out with the apostles, *We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth d*.

But I see no reason why *the word of Christ* is not to be understood of the Scriptures in general. Of him the Bible principally treats. To him, the Messiah, its doctrines and laws, its rites and ceremonies, its histories and prophecies, have all a direct or more remote reference. Nor can we conceive rightly of any of them, much less of their connection and mutual dependance, if he is shut out from our view. It is also to be remembered, that the holy Scriptures were written by the Spirit of Christ. So it is expressly said that 'the Spirit of Christ which was in the prophets testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow *e*.' And it was by the same Spirit the evangelists and apostles were instructed to write the Gospels and Epistles. So that the Bible

a John vii. 46.
b Luke iv. 20, 22.
c John iii. 29.
d John i. 14.
e 1 Pet. i. 2.

from the beginning to the end may with the strictest propriety be denominated *the word of Christ.*

Now the apostle admonishes us in the text *to let the word of Christ*, that is, the Bible, *dwell in us richly in all wisdom.* The amount of which advice is,

I. That we make the Bible our own;

II. That we on no account part with it; and,

III. That we improve it to the best and noblest purposes. Each of these heads of advice I propose to consider and enforce.

I. It should be our anxious concern to make the word of God *our own*, that is, to *understand* it—and *enter into the spirit* of it. Let us begin,

First, With the *understanding* Scripture.

This is absolutely necessary to our receiving benefit from it. Many, it is not to be doubted, mistake the sense of Scripture; yea some *wrest it to their own destruction a.* I propose therefore to point out to you the temper of mind with which we should set about the study of the Bible;—and then to lay down some rules for fixing the meaning of it, and enabling us to form a right judgment of its leading truths.

1. Watch against prejudices which before you are aware may pervert the plain meaning of what you read.

The will hath a great influence on the judgment; and that being indisposed, this is often thereby obstructed in its operations. The renewed mind is indeed subjected to the authority of God. Yet pride and pleasure, the prevailing passions of human nature, will sometimes cast a mist before the eyes of good men themselves, and in a degree warp if not absolutely pervert their judgment. These passions therefore must be held under the severest restraint.

But there are other prejudices less criminal, yet of a tendency that should be watched with a jealous eye; I mean prejudices of education, and which arise from a partiality in favour of the good understanding of those with whom we happen to be connected.

It must be acknowledged these prejudices are very natural, and have their use if directed to their proper object. Which

a 2 Pet. iii. 16.

I the rather observe as there are too many young people who, from a wish to be accounted men of sense, hastily renounce the religious opinions in which they were educated, without being able to give any satisfactory reason for their conduct. But such persons justly merit contempt. They are the dupes of unmanly affectation and conceit, if not of more base and criminal passions. How senseless the conclusion!—"Because such and such principles were held by my ancestors, therefore I am to presume they are not true." If this reasoning were admitted, it would cease to be the duty of parents to instruct their children in the principles of religion, truth and error would be confounded, and all occasion for the exercise of private judgment superseded. Partiality in favour of the wisdom and piety of our parents is a commendable passion. And as it ought to hold us back from treating the religious profession of our ancestors with contempt, so it may be of use to dispose us the more seriously to enquire into the grounds and reasons of that profession. In the mean while, if they lived holily and died comfortably in the faith of those doctrines they taught us, I can see no harm in presuming that possibly they may be true.—But to return to our argument,

These prejudices are hurtful when they preclude enquiry, throw the mind out of that balance which ought to be observed in the investigatiou of truth, and incline it to put a forced construction upon the plain language of Scripture. They are then real evils, and ought to be guarded against with the greatest caution. For if our faith is pleasing to God and useful to ourselves, it must stand on the ground not of human but divine testimony. And there is the greater reason for this caution, as it is to be feared the religion of too many people, through prejudice, sloth, and passion, hath no other foundation than that of implicit faith. Happy the man who reads his Bible divested of prejudice, and sincerely desirous of following wherever truth shall lead him!

2. Let us be humble and modest in our enquiries about divine truth.

God is an infinitely great and glorious Being: we should lay it down therefore as a principle never to be departed from,

that to his will, however signified to us, we are bound to pay entire and unlimited obedience. His essence is incomprehensible, and his thoughts and ways are often very different from ours. Angels are incompetent to the full investigation of questions respecting the nature and operations of the Deity: how much more we! What a reverential awe of God then should possess our minds when enquiring about his nature and will! And how deeply sensible should we be of our liableness through various causes to err!

If we are vain of our understanding, it is scarce to be doubted that our speculations will mislead us. Humility and modesty are inseparable ingredients of such free enquiry as promises success. And where these tempers are cherished, enquiry will not be pushed *beyond the bounds* which right reason hath fixed. Of this mistake some have been guilty, and through an eager desire of knowing what the human intellect is incapable of comprehending, have precipitated themselves into the depths of scepticism, till at length they have come to question their own existence. Nor shall we, if modest and humble, expect *a kind of evidence* on any subject which its nature will not allow. How absurd to require mathematical demonstration in questions of moral truth! To demand the testimony of our own senses to facts which, if known and believed at all, must be received on the testimony of others! And to require a miracle to convince us of truths, sufficiently attested to satisfy any sober enquirer! Moderation therefore should be observed in all our researches after divine knowledge.

And if a proposition after the most painful examination remains doubtful, we should modestly call in to our assistance the judgment of others; and give that weight to their decisions which their character for wisdom and piety demands, not suffering at the same time our judgment and conscience to be overawed by any human authority whatever. Such conduct is so far from being an argument of weakness, that it will ever be considered by wise and good men, as a proof both of sound sense and genuine religion.

3. The duties of diligence and perseverance are also to be recommended.

Truth is a jewel for which we must dig with incessant labour, seeking for it as for hid treasure. We must *cry after knowledge, and lift up our voice for understanding a.* We must take pains to get a clear idea of the strength or weakness of our mental powers, that so we may not on the one hand unduly distrust our own judgment, nor on the other lay too great a stress upon it. And no less diligent should we be in the examination of our hearts, that we may not be led astray by that fatal influence which passion and prejudice too often have, though unobserved, on men's enquiries after truth.

We must consider with attention and impartiality the arguments on both sides of the question in debate, stating them fairly, and giving them their full force. We must be particularly careful, that we do not too hastily leap from the premises to the conclusion; and be willing to be held a while in suspense, rather than shut out further light by prematurely pronouncing on the matter before us, and so subjecting ourselves to the mortification of retracting what we have affirmed. We must diligently read our Bible, marking well the scope of the writer, and comparing one part of Scripture with another. We must daily 'draw water out of these wells of salvation *b*,' calling in every help which Providence affords, to facilitate this laborious but pleasant employment.

In a word, let us 'watch at Wisdom's gates, and wait at the porch of her doors *c*;' make the wise and pious our companions; reduce speculation to practice; and compare the information we get from the Bible with the character and condition of mankind, and the numerous events which daily rise to our view.—Once more,

4. To our endeavours we must add fervent and incessant prayer.

If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, the Father of lights, who giveth liberally, and upbraideth not d. He who hath endowed us with intellectual powers, knows how to assist us in the use of those powers. And he from whom all grace comes, will make the sincere and humble enquirer superior to

a Prov. ii. 3. *b* Isa. xii. 3.
c Prov. viii. 34. *d* James i. 5, 17.

the obstructions thrown in the way of his pursuits, by the corrupt maxims of the world, and the passions and prejudices of his own heart. Let us then with the pious psalmist pray, *Lead me in thy truth, and teach me: for thou art the God of my salvation, on thee do I wait all the day a. Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law b.* And we may hope that *that* promise, which was made to the immediate followers of Christ, shall be fulfilled to us; so far as to secure us from every dangerous error, and to introduce us to the knowledge of every necessary truth; *The Spirit of truth shall guide you into all truth c.*

Thus prepared for reading our Bible we shall be secured, with the assistance of a few plain observations, from mistaking its meaning in any instance of importance; and be enabled to form a right judgment of the gospel, or *the word of Christ*, as it is expressed in our text.

A book I will suppose put into my hands of which I had no idea before. I ask, Who is the author? For whose use he writes? And what is the subject he treats of? I am assured that he is an honest and sensible man; that he writes for the information of the simple as well as the learned; and that the subject is important, and what the world has hitherto been wholly uninformed about.

Persuaded of this, I sit down to read the book. The language is plain, the phraseology familiar, and the reasoning conclusive. But I meet with facts, the ground of all the reasonings of the book, which greatly surprise me. Remembering however that the information I was here to receive would be new, and extraordinary, I am not disgusted. And finding upon the closest examination that the phænomena reported, however strange, are not impossible; and reflecting that the difficulty of accounting for them may be owing to my weakness, inexperience, or some unhappy prejudice; I admit their truth upon the testimony of my author, not venturing, in order to get rid of my difficulties, to impose a sense on his words they will not bear. And this I am the rather disposed to do, as the use to which these phænomena are applied is highly in-

a Psal. xxv. 5. b Psal. cxix. 18. c John xvi. 13.

teresting and important, and his reasoning in the application of them, which takes up the greater part of the book, is plain and forcible. So, instructed, entertained, and profited, I give my author thanks; and put his book into the hands of my neighbour, who is as simple as myself, not doubting but he will understand it in the same sense I have done, and be as much profited by it as I have been. To apply this reasoning to the subject before us—

It should then, *first*, be diligently remembered, that the Bible was written by holy men who could not mean to mislead and confound their readers, or to conceal from them what was fit and necessary to be known; or if this had been possible, that such a controlling influence was exerted over their minds as would have infallibly prevented these evils. Indeed the book was written by God, and therefore we may depend upon the truth of its histories, doctrines, and precepts. God cannot deceive, the Scriptures cannot be broken. This sentiment should be deeply impressed upon our hearts: as also this further idea, that the thoughts and ways of God are often very different from ours, and that therefore we should not think it strange if he calls our attention to matters, which at first view may seem to us absolutely unaccountable.

It is also, *secondly*, to be remembered, that this book is written for the use of the illiterate as well as the learned, and for purposes of the greatest importance to their present and eternal welfare. It might therefore be presumed that the language would be plain and intelligible. Words would be used in their common and generally acknowledged sense. No other figurative modes of expression would be adopted than are natural and easy to be comprehended. If allegories or parables were introduced, care would be taken to announce them as such, or to prevent the reader's understanding them in the literal sense. If terms familiar to Jews and Pagans were interwoven with the Christian doctrine, the intent would be to convey thereby precisely the same ideas which both the one and the other were used to affix to them. The insidious arts of sophists, declaimers, and temporisers, being utterly rejected, there would be no occasion for having recourse to far-fetched

allusions, curious logical distinctions, or other subtilties to develope the meaning of Scripture. All this might naturally be presumed, and of consequence the first sense which a plain reader would put on what he reads, would in most instances be the true one.

It should be further observed, *thirdly*, that as the Bible is a revelation from God, it is natural to expect that it should convey information to our minds hitherto unknown, and which could not be acquired by the mere exertion of our natural powers. If therefore it asserts what is new, marvellous, and at first view almost incredible, concerning the divine essence; concerning Christ, his person, incarnation, miracles, death, and resurrection; concerning the intent of these extraordinary facts; concerning the Holy Spirit, and his operations on the hearts of men; and concerning the resurrection of the body and a future state; however this light may dazzle our mental sight, it should not offend. No such disgust should it create, as to put us upon unnatural measures to extinguish it, such as imposing a forced sense on the words, phrases, and sentences of Scripture—a sense which would have never entered the mind of a plain reader, and which with the utmost force of criticism can scarce be made consistent and intelligible.

If indeed what is asserted can be proved to be absurd and impossible, it should be rejected, and with it the book itself which contains and authorises such assertion. But the difficulty of clearly comprehending the modus of facts plainly asserted, and of doctrines as plainly stated, is no reason why such facts and doctrines should be rejected.

This will clearly appear if we consider, that the principle on which this mistaken reasoning is grounded would justify the rejection of a thousand phænomena attested by our own senses, or reported to us by credible witnesses. It would preclude God himself from demanding our assent to any truth we cannot fully comprehend, and so interdict the very idea of an extraordinary revelation. And indeed, if upon the mere pretence that what is asserted in a passage of Scripture is too strange to be true, the plain natural sense of such passage is to be set aside, and a violent one obtruded upon us in its room,

all interpretation of Scripture will become precarious and uncertain.

On the contrary, we are to remember, as was before observed, that the idea of a revelation from God naturally leads us to expect discoveries that are marvellous and extraordinary. So that if the Bible were no other than a second edition of the law of nature, it would want one internal evidence of its divine authority, an evidence which right reason authorises us to expect in a book of this description.—It is also to be recollected, that the difficulty of fully comprehending the grounds and reasons of many propositions objected to, is not owing to any defect in the Scripture mode of treating them, but to the nature of the subject itself discoursed of, and the weakness of the human intellect.

Moreover, the utility, dignity, and grandeur of these discoveries afford a noble collateral reason why, instead of rejecting them with contempt, we should receive them with infinite gratitude, wonder, and delight. *The great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh a*, to *purchase the church with his own blood b*, and *to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself c*, may at first glance excite doubt as well as astonishment. So that in the language of pious incredulity we may be apt to exclaim, *What is man*, O Lord, *that thou art* thus *mindful of him, and the Son of man that thou visitest him d!* But upon examination there appears such an august display of wisdom, rectitude, and benignity in the plan of redemption, as furnishes a strong presumptive evidence of its truth. The sublimity of the Christian doctrine, instead of shaking, establishes its divine authority. Since, however, the mystery God has thus revealed so infinitely surpasses what we could have expected or imagined, he has taken care to assist our faith, trembling amidst this effulgence of divine glories, with a kind of miraculous evidence suited to the magnitude of the truths it was intended to prove.

To all which it must be added, that the faith thus demanded of us, purely on the ground of the divine testimony, is a

a 1 Tim. iii. 16. *b* Acts xx. 28.
c Heb. ix. 26. *d* Psal. viii. 4.—Heb. ii. 6.

noble test of genuine piety, and operates as the strongest incentive to the duties we owe both to God and man. That morality which is imbibed at the pure fountain of evangelic truth is of all others the most refined, energetic, and exalted. 'The grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world *a*.'—Let us proceed,

SECONDLY, To shew you that the word of God should be in our *affections* as well as our understanding.

The most accurate knowledge of Scripture will do us no real good, if it hath not a commanding influence on the judgment and conscience—if it doth not incorporate itself with the vital principles of the soul. It may indeed make us skilful disputants, and become an occasion of enflaming the passions of self-conceit, prejudice and bigotry. But what gainers are men by mere speculation in matters of religion? It does them no real honour, and contributes little to their usefulness or happiness: on the contrary, it seldom fails to make them proud and callous, and to set them further from God than even ignorance itself.

It is therefore of the last consequence, that the knowledge which irradiates our minds, warm our hearts. The genial influence of the sun is of as much importance to the creation as its enlightening beams: could they be separated the effect would be fatal. Let the word of God then which informs your understanding, Christians, mingle itself with your affections. If it excites in your breast ingenuous sorrow for your past offences, and a lively hope in the mercy of God through Christ; bitter resentments against sin, and an ardent desire after holiness; indifference to the vain pleasures of the world, and a warm attachment of heart to the chief good; love to the great Author and Source of all beauty, excellence, and perfection, and cordial benevolence to your fellow-creatures; if, in a word, while it displays to your view the transcendant love of God in your redemption by Christ, it diffuses a sacred glow of wonder, gratitude, and joy over your souls, then it is *in you*

a Tit. ii. 11, 12.

to the best and noblest purposes. Thus interweaving itself with the practical powers of the heart, and giving life and vigour to the whole frame, it will make you wise, happy, and holy.

Now to attain these great objects it is our duty when we read the Bible to set God before our eyes, to charge it upon ourselves to remember that every sentence of it was written with his finger, and seriously to consider that the truths it exhibits are most interesting and important. It is our duty to pray, that the good Spirit of God who deigns to irradiate the benighted mind, would be also pleased to fix conviction on the conscience, and kindle a flame of sacred devotion in the heart. It is our duty to realize the solemnities of the last day, when a strict enquiry will be made into our abuse or improvement of this book, and sentence will be pronounced according to the decisions of these sacred records.

Nor should we at the same time lose sight of the pleasing advantages which will result from a diligent perusal of Scripture, lest this business should unhappily become a task instead of an entertainment.

When therefore we sit down to read our Bible, let us unite with the solemn considerations just mentioned, such pleasant and enlivening meditations as these—"I have before me a book which has made many an attentive reader of it wise and happy. Why may not I reap the like benefit from it? This is the map of the country through which I am travelling to the celestial city. The compass by which I am to steer my course over the tempestuous ocean of human life. The man of my counsel who kindly offers to be my guide and companion. The brook of which I am to drink as I pass on my way, and lift up my head. The bread of life sent down from heaven to strengthen my heart. And the pleasant song by which I am to beguile the passing hours, in the house of my pilgrimage." The book of God thus read, with a pious wish every now and then darted to heaven, will quickly find place in our *affections*, as well as our understanding.—So we pass on to the second head of discourse,

II. That the Bible, thus become ours, should on no ac-

count be parted with.—But we must not now enter upon the consideration of this question. It shall suffice at present, to close what has been said with a serious address to four sorts of persons—those who have not the word of God, either in their understandings or their affections—those who have it in the former, but not the latter—those of the contrary description—and those who have the word both in their understandings, and their hearts.

(1.) How much is their case to be lamented who can in no sense be said to have the word of God!

They who rightly understand the nature and value of civil liberty, cannot but feel for their fellow-creatures groaning under the galling yoke of tyranny. Penetrated with these feelings, they consider it as their duty to communicate all the light they can to mankind on this interesting question. How much stronger is the reasoning when applied to the great concerns of religion! The yoke of sin is infinitely more humiliating and destructive than that of civil oppression. Is it not then the incumbent duty of those who have been themselves emancipated from the bondage of corruption, and admitted into the glorious liberty of the children of God, to contribute their utmost towards enlightening the minds of their fellow men on this important subject, and so exciting in their breasts an ardent desire of freedom?

And what is the grand mean to this end? It is the free circulation of the Bible, wherein this great blessing is held up to our view in all its native charms; the Son of God proclaiming with a voice from heaven *liberty to captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound a.* The zeal with which this measure has of late been adopted and pursued in this country, gives no small pleasure to good men, amidst their painful feelings on other accounts. May success crown the generous efforts of pious benevolence, and the knowledge of the Lord cover not only this land but the whole earth, as the waters do the channels of the deep *b*!

a Isa. lxi. 1.

b Here it may not be improper to inform the reader of the several benevolent institutions in this country, whose main object is the spread of the

But how lamentable is it that such multitudes of our countrymen should still continue slaves to sin, and utter strangers to this the grand charter of liberty? By what arguments, Sirs, may we hope to gain your attention to this important object? Have you no curiosity to gratify?—no sense of your obligation to those, who wish to introduce you to the enjoyment of freedom, wealth, and happiness?—no desire to have the evils of the present life alleviated which owe their existence to ignorance, folly, and sin?—no concern to escape the wrath of God in the world to come, and, if there be a heaven, to have admission at death to that happy place? Shall this benevolent stranger knock at your door, and you refuse him entrance? Shall your kind friends wish you to accept this boon at their hands, and you reject it? Or if you accept it, shall this book, which has the stamp of divine authority upon it, be treated with neglect? Will you make no use of it, take no pains to understand it? O think what awful consequences such ingratitude, such baseness, must draw after it in the great day of account. He who wrote this book, and sent it you for your perusal, will be your Judge; and if you remain impenitent, the just sentence his lips will denounce upon you neither angels nor men will be able to reverse.

(2.) Nor is their condition less to be lamented, who in a sense have the word of God in their understanding, but give it no place in their hearts.

Some there are—and how deplorable such characters!—who value themselves upon their knowledge of the Scriptures, but *wrest them*, as the apostle Peter expresses it, *unto their own destruction a*. This disingenuous treatment of the appointed mean of salvation, cannot fail of drawing down upon you, Sirs, be you who you may, the displeasure of Heaven.

Bible; viz.—"The Society for promoting Christian Knowledge, in Bartlett's-buildings, Holborn."—"The Society for promoting Religious Knowledge, in Founder's-Hall, Lothbury."—"The Society in Scotland, for propagating Christian Knowledge in the Highlands and Islands; whose Corresponding Board in London meets in Scot's-Hall Crane-court, Fleet-street."—"The Sunday Schools throughout the kingdom."

a 2 Pet. iii. 16.

The wilful misconstruction of the statute-law of any country, not only to excuse the violation of it but authorise disobedience to it, is ever held as an high offence against the supreme legislature. It is a crime pregnant with the most fatal evils. What are you then doing who wilfully pervert the Scriptures? It is horrid cruelty to the immortal souls of men. It is high treason against the Majesty of heaven.

But there are others who go not these lengths, put no unnatural force on Scripture; on the contrary admit the truths it contains, and are vain of their adroitness in stating and defending them: yet, alas! the word of Christ is not theirs in the sense of the text. It hath no place in their affections. Oh, Sirs, What will your superior light and knowledge, your boasted skill and accuracy, avail you? It may excite the wonder of the ignorant, and gain the applause of such vain empty professors as yourselves; but be assured, instead of procuring you any real good, it will only aggravate your condemnation. It is not the soundness of your creed that will save you. If your hearts are not moulded into the spirit of the gospel, and your lives governed by its sacred dictates, it were better you had never claimed acquaintance with it, or officiously drawn your sword in the defence of it. *Not every one that saith, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doth the will of my Father*, says Christ, *who is in heaven. Many*, he adds, *will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me ye that work iniquity a.* O consider these things, ye speculative Christians; ye champions in a cause for which you have no real affection; ye miserable dupes to your own vanity, who care not what may be the event of your contention for the truth, provided you may but display your skill to the view of surrounding spectators.

(3.) Another character to which a few words should be addressed, is that of the unhappy men, who seem as if they had

a Matt. vii. 21—23.

the word in their affections, while it is plain it hath no place in their understanding.

This is a character directly opposed to the former. The affection which these men express for religion, not being the fruit of divine illumination, cannot be genuine. It is no other than mere passion, excited by causes purely mechanical, and of which they can themselves give no intelligible account. Allowance doubtless is to be made for the weakness of men's understandings: and many a sincere Christian there is, whose heart is warmed by those divine truths which he has not talents clearly to state and defend. But I am speaking of those who are grossly ignorant, yet clamorously zealous. Their character our Lord has drawn to the life in the parable of the sower, wherein he compares them to stony ground covered with a thin bed of earth, from whence the seed instantly upon its being sown springs up, but having no root quickly withers and dies away. In these men there is no alliance, scarce any connection, between the understanding and the heart. Their zeal is without knowledge, and the devotion of which they boast is the offspring of ignorance.

To you, Sirs, I am at a loss how to address myself. Permit me however to say, if the word of God is justly described as *a light shining in a dark place a*, if it be an emanation from supreme Wisdom, if it be the perfection of reason; surely it is not imaginable that it was meant to operate on the human heart, without communicating any information to the mind. Can you think that mere agitation of the passions, the elevation of the voice, the violent distortion of the limbs, or any active service whatever, performed without any assignable reason, motive, or cause but that of fancy or imagination; can be acceptable to God or profitable to man? Be assured, the service God demands is *a reasonable service b*; the doctrines which the Bible teaches are 'words of truth and soberness *c*;' and the influence exerted over the mind in the great concern of religion, extends as well to the understanding and conscience, as the will and affections. Beware then how you mistake enthusiasm for substantial godliness.

a 2 Pet. i, 19. *b* Rom. xii. 1. *c* Acts xxvi. 25.

(4.) The last character to be addressed, is that of the happy men, who have the word of God both in their understandings and their hearts.

Be thankful to God, my brethren, for so ordering external events as thereby to lead you into an acquaintance with the Scriptures. It was his providence that cast your lot in a country, where the light of divine truth shines; and in an age wherein it is not accounted a crime, as it once was, to read the Bible.—Was it your happiness to derive from parents who brought you up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, so that from a child you knew the Scriptures? While you recollect their tears, prayers, and unwearied endeavours for your spiritual good; how thankful should you be to God, who caused you to spring from such parents, and who thus disposed them to their duty!—Did you become acquainted with this blessed book by hearing it daily read in the family with whom you happened to live, and in whose lives you saw its sacred truths exemplified? Acknowledge the hand of God in casting your lot in that family.—Was it by the seasonable counsel of some friend that you were first induced to read your Bible, and seriously weigh its contents? Recollect with gratitude to Heaven the circumstances which led you into an intimacy with that friend, and which gave occasion to such salutary discourse.—Did the public preaching of the word rouse you from the slumbers of sin, and put you upon searching the Scriptures? Forget not the providence that guided you to that place of worship, and engaged your attention to those seasonable expostulations.—Or was you driven to your Bible by worldly trouble, and the failure of relief and comfort in every other quarter? Observe the kind hand that thus chastised you to recover you to your duty.

But there is something more than all this which demands your recollection and most grateful acknowledgment. I mean the influence of divine grace exerted on your minds, as well as that of providence on your external affairs. External events might have been arranged in the manner just represented, and yet no salutary effect resulted thence. If then the Bible has become yours, in the most important sense, by enlightening

your understanding, and mingling itself with the practical powers of your soul; you must, you will own that it is of God. This is the doctrine of that book which you have received as of divine original. It was God that *opened your eyes to behold wondrous things out of his law a.* His grace fixed your attention to it, assisted your faculties in the study of it, held back the veil of prejudice which had concealed its truths, and impressed them with efficacy on your hearts. His grace relieved you of your discouraging doubts and fears, comforted you with the hopes of pardon and eternal life, and animated you to your duty by the transcendant love of Christ, in your redemption. *By the grace of God,* said the apostle, *I am what I am b.* Adopt the same language, Christians, with sincere and cordial devotion, and let your lives speak it with an energy that exceeds the warmest professions of the lips.

DISCOURSE VIII.

THE DUTY WHICH CHRISTIANS OWE TO THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

COL. III. 16.—*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom,*——.

BY *the word of Christ* I have shewn you we are here to understand the whole Bible, for the doctrine of Christ is the grand subject of which it treats, and the Holy Spirit who inspired it is emphatically styled *The Spirit of Christ c.* Now the apostle exhorts us in the text to pay the most sacred regard to the Scriptures. And the amount of the exhortation is this—To make the Bible our own—On no consideration to part with it—And to apply it to its proper use.

a Psal. cxix. 18. *b* 1 Cor. xv. 10. *c* 1 Pet. i. 11.

The first of these particulars was the subject of the former discourse. The word of God is *ours* (or *in us* as the text expresses it) if it be in our *understanding* and in our *hearts*. We have therefore laid down certain rules to assist us in collecting the sense of Scripture—and shewn you what measures are to be taken in order to our entering into the spirit of its sacred truths.—And we now proceed,

II. To shew that the Bible, thus become ours, ought on no account to be parted with. *Let the word of Christ* DWELL IN YOU.

This heavenly guest once admitted should no more be suffered to go out: such entertainment should be given it as may secure its constant residence in our hearts. At its approach, struck with the condescension and benignity of the blessed God, did we with astonishment cry out, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in *a*?' how solemnly should we charge all the powers of our souls to watch against every expression of disrespect which may provoke him to depart! For if he depart, what have we to apprehend but shame and misery? If, to use the language of the prophet on another occasion, 'the Lord cast off his altar, and abhor his sanctuary; if the gates of Zion are sunk into the ground, and her bars are destroyed and broken; if the law is no more, and there be no more vision from the Lord, how will they that pass by clap their hands and say, Is this the temple of the living God, the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth *b*?' Let the word of Christ then, which is to us what the ark and the Shechinah were to Israel of old, take up its constant abode in our hearts.

Our Saviour, in the parable of the sower *c*, gives a striking description of the treatment the word meets with from various kinds of hearers. A general view of their several characters will explain what is meant by *his word's dwelling in us*, and direct us to the measures proper to be taken to that end.

Some seed fell by the way-side, and was immediately trodden under foot, or devoured by the fowls of the air. Some fell on stony ground, quickly sprung up, and promised a fair and

a Psal. xxiv. 7. *b* Lam. ii. 7—9, 15. *c* Matt. xiii. 3—9.

plentiful harvest: but there being no depth of earth sufficient for it to take root, the scorching beams of the sun soon consumed it. Again, other seed was thrown into the hedge, where it had more earth to receive and nourish it: but when it began to shoot out of the ground, the briars and thorns sprung up with it and choked it, so that it yielded no fruit. The rest fell on good ground, where it took deep root, and so receiving due nourishment and support, grew to its full height: the ears filled, and at the proper season produced a rich crop, some thirty, some sixty, and some an hundred fold.

By these figures our Lord meant to describe, as we learn from what followed *a*, four different characters. In neither of the three first does the word abide in the sense of our text. Yet the effect of it upon the second class of hearers, is more considerable than on the first; and on the third still more than on either of the former.

Of inattentive hearers, the first character in the parable, it can scarce be said that the word is in them at all. It makes only a transient impression on their minds. Not being understood, it is not laid up in their memory; and treated with neglect, it leaves them destitute of the necessary means to guard them against the wiles of Satan and his emissaries.

Enthusiastic hearers do indeed manifest greater attention and earnestness. The word mingles with the natural passions, signified by the fine mould that covered the rocky ground: it is received with joy, and professed with zeal. But then it is not in the understanding, nor does it so lay hold on the heart as to become a principle of action. And of consequence, when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, they are offended; and having no root in themselves, angrily renounce that profession, which in the heat of unmeaning zeal they were so forward to make.

The third character is more promising. In the enclosure there is greater depth of earth, and more moisture than on the barren rock. The man of this description is better instructed, and for a while more cautious and steady in his profession than

a Matt. xiii. 18—23.

the former. The ground however not being made good, the heart still continuing unrenewed, thorns and briars, that is, the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word. So, deprived of the nourishment he should otherwise receive from it, although his profession is not absolutely renounced, yet no fruit is brought to perfection.

The last character, that of the sincere Christian, with whose heart the word incorporates itself, and so produces fruit; answers directly to that in the text. In him *the word of Christ abides.* It hath entered his understanding, and taken such fast hold on his will and affections, that he can on no account consent to part with it. And yet, well affected as the man of this description is to his Bible, it behoves him to be on his guard, for he may depend upon it every possible attempt will be used to rob him of this inestimable treasure. Now the most natural mean to secure him against such attempts is, the well considering the three characters just mentioned, and the true causes of their failure.—The evils then to be avoided, if you wish, Christians, to have the word of God abide in you, are *Inattention*, *Enthusiasm*, and *Worldly-mindedness.*

First, *Inattention.*

When indifference to religion prevails, the Bible, if read at all, will be little regarded. Running it over in a careless manner we shall not understand it. Not understanding it we shall be at little pains to lay it up in our memory. And not having it in our memory or our hearts, it is much if the enemy does not soon wrest it from our hands. It is of the last consequence therefore to our securing this invaluable treasure, that a sense of the infinite importance of religion is preserved on our minds. So shall we not only read the word at stated seasons, and in an orderly manner, but also make a point of understanding it. And understanding it we shall be likely to retain it in our memory.

Here let me digress a moment on the nature and use of the memory. This faculty is so mechanically framed as to be capable of great improvement by attention and labour. Wonders have been done in this way by mere dint of resolution, especially in early life. The cultivation therefore of this faculty

ought to be an object in the education of children. For by accustoming them to commit to memory useful portions of instruction, the mind is not only stocked with knowledge, but the memory, if not over-burthened, is strengthened and improved.

Now if this idea be just, there can I think be no doubt that the getting certain paragraphs or verses of the Bible by heart, ought to be made an essential part of the business of children. If this matter were duly attended to, I am persuaded the consequence would be salutary. And it is in effect, if not in so many words, urged upon parents in Scripture. How natural a mean this to engage their attention and conciliate their affections to the truths and duties of religion! And though it does not in every instance succeed immediately to our wish, it should be remembered that there are young people who, upon their recovery by the grace of God from sinful courses, have been greatly benefited by the recollection of passages of Scripture thus committed to their memory in childhood. Would to God this advice were duly regarded! Let parents well consider the account they have to give another day upon this great question of the religious education of their children. And to animate them to their duty, let me remind them that an inspired pen hath made the names of a Lois and Eunice immortal, who gave such distinguishing proofs of their piety, by bringing up young Timothy in the nurture and admonition of the Lord *a*.—To return,

The word of God thus laid up in the memory of him who has a real affection to it, will scarce fail of being frequently recollected and meditated upon. So it will come to be better understood, and will be ever at hand to guard him against the assaults of Satan and the false reasoning of seducers. If our Lord himself gained so glorious a victory over this subtle adversary by the skilful use of the Scriptures, we may hope by the use of the same weapon, with his assistance, to triumph over the same enemy.—And thus you see what are the means to preserve this good seed from being trodden under foot, or picked up by the fowls of the air and devoured.

SECONDLY, *Enthusiasm.*

a 2 Tim. i. 5. iii. 15.

This is the second evil to be guarded against, as having a tendency to deprive us of God's word. Some may perhaps reason quite the contrary way, and think that it is owing to the want of enthusiasm that too many so easily part with their religion. And indeed they are right, if by enthusiasm is meant no more than a cordial and affectionate attachment to the truth. But this is not a just definition of the term. By enthusiasm I mean mere natural passion, excited either by external objects, or by accidental impressions made on the fancy, of which the man can himself give no rational account. The religion of the enthusiast has nothing to do with the understanding, nor has it any real hold on the heart, so as to be a regular vital principle of action. This unhappy temper, under the vivid glowing appearance of religious zeal, will not fail to play the word of God into the hands of its enemies, and after a while to precipitate its possessor into a conduct directly opposite to his sacred profession.

The Christian therefore, who wishes to have the word of Christ dwell in him, must guard against every approach to this dangerous evil. The passions are not indeed to be laid asleep: if however on the contrary they have the reins given them, ruin must follow. How is the Bible to be secured from the assaults of infidelity, or its truths guarded against the misinterpretations of its pretended friends, if it hath no place in our understanding and judgment? How are we to hold fast the book of God in a time of sharp persecution, if all the account we can give of our regard for it is, that it came recommended to us by a kind of tone and gesture that set our passions on fire, and interested us we know not how in its favour? And what reason have we to expect that the word of God should dwell in us, and secure us from apostacy in a time of prosperity, if it has never yet incorporated itself with our hearts, so as to become the governing rule of our lives? Let us therefore always give the lead to the understanding, and not suffer our passions to hurry us into a profession of religion, without the subjection of our judgment and conscience to the divine authority.

THIRDLY. The third evil to be studiously avoided is *Worldly-mindedness.*

Covetousness is idolatry, and the word of God can have no place in a heart consecrated to the worship of false gods. *What agreement hath the temple of God with idols a?* But it is possible that affections which bear some affinity to covetousness, may find their way into the temple of the living God. And when this happens the devotion of this sacred place will, at least for a time, be interdicted. The lamp that enlightens it will burn dim, and the incense that perfumes it lose its fragrance. Undue anxiety about the world, and especially fond desires after its perishing enjoyments, will deprive us both of opportunity and inclination to carry on our usual intercourse with the word of God. The sword of the Spirit will be in no small danger of falling from the trembling hand of the Christian, borne down with worldly disappointments, and upon the point of yielding to unbelief. And he who suffers his heart and hours to be engrossed with schemes of ambition, wealth, and pleasure, will quickly lose his relish for the solid entertainment this divine book affords: and what gives him little comfort he will be at little pains to use and defend. O how has the world forced its way into the retirement of many a Christian! How has it wrested the Bible from his hands, or at least silenced its voice, and for a while nearly extinguished its light!

Let us therefore be continually on our guard against so dangerous an enemy. Watch, Christian, every avenue of your heart. When anxious cares, in a gloomy habit and with a frowning countenance, approach you, instead of being driven from the word of God by their cruel threats, be you thereby driven to it. This is the refuge, the only refuge, where you will find security against the assaults of this formidable enemy. On the other hand, let me earnestly beseech you to be particularly jealous of the fascinating smiles of prosperity. This is perhaps a more dangerous adversary than the former. Its mode of attack is insinuating, not by storm but slow and easy advances. Be awake, have your eyes about you, or the world will enter before you are aware. And once entered, the first fruit of its success will be seen in a shy indifference to your Bible; which will be quickly followed, if divine grace prevent not, with its

a 2 Cor. vi. 16.

surrender to the enemy. And the means of defence thus gone, where is your security against a total and final defeat? *Keep your heart therefore with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life a.*

If then our principal danger of being deprived of God's word, lies in *Inattention*, *Enthusiasm*, and *Worldliness*, which are therefore to be diligently watched against; it follows that the opposite tempers will operate powerfully to the preservation of this invaluable treasure. If we read it with attention, seriousness, and regularity; if we keep a check upon our passions, not suffering them to offer violence to our judgment; and if we studiously endeavour to preserve equanimity amidst the vicissitudes of life, not elated with the smiles nor sunk by the frowns of the world, it will be impossible for the adversary to wrest this sacred book from our hands. The word of Christ, under his gracious protection, will dwell securely in our hearts.—But, it is not enough that it dwells in us, it must,

III. Be applied to its proper use.—Let it dwell in you *richly* or opulently *b*, and *in all wisdom c*. In like manner the apostle expresses his earnest wish in this context *d*, that they might *be filled with the knowledge of the divine will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding*. And elsewhere the grace of God is said *to abound towards us in all wisdom and prudence e.*

Wealth, as it sets men beyond the reach of that anxiety and contempt which usually attends poverty, as it possesses them of the conveniencies and comforts of life, and as it commands influence and respect in society, is held in universal estimation. But riches, however eagerly coveted on these accounts, if not accompanied with the nobler gifts of *Liberality* and *Prudence*, are a curse instead of a blessing to their possessor. The like may be said of the Bible. It is a mine of inexhaustible treasure. But if we have no heart to use it, or no discretion to manage it aright, it will not only be unprofitable, but prove an occasion of great evil. Let me then

a Prov. iv. 23. *b* πλουσίως. *c* ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ.
d Chap. i. 9. *e* Eph. i. 8.

exhort you to be liberal—and give you some prudential directions for the management of your wealth.

First, Let the word of God dwell in you *richly*, that is, be of a liberal spirit.

A narrow, selfish, penurious disposition, ill becomes a Christian. How despicable is the wretch who hoards up his treasure, without communicating any portion of it to others, or enjoying it himself! The reverse is the character of a disciple of Jesus. If riches are his lot, his religion will dispose him to acts of beneficence. His heart will feel for the wretched, and his hand afford them relief. And his gratitude to God will express itself by enjoying the good bestowed upon him. And may not the same temper be expected of the Christian in regard of that better wealth now under consideration? The argument here receives additional force from the superior *value* of heavenly riches, their *congeniality to his renewed nature*, and the *divine munificence* in the bestowment of them.

In his word God has opened to you, Christian, *treasures* of knowledge, grace, and happiness. *He hath abounded towards you in all wisdom and prudence a.* Being *rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved you, even when you were dead in sins, he quickened you together with Christ, and raised you up together, and made you sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards you, through Christ Jesus b.* And is it possible that the charter of your rights and liberties, the instrument by which this glorious inheritance is conveyed to you, the covenant which secures it, yea, that this immense wealth itself, the noblest gift of the great God, the purchase of his Son's blood, and what raises you above the rank of angels; is it possible, I say, that these riches should be yours, and you have no heart to use and enjoy them?

That *nobility of mind* too which makes you superior to the abject grovelling spirit of the miser, must surely make you proud of property the value of which angels cannot compute,

a Eph. i. 8. *b* Eph. ii. 4—7.

and which exalts you to a seat near the throne of God himself. Nothing is more remote from the prevailing temper of a Christian than avarice. The Scriptures speak of many excellent characters as sullied with other irregular passions, but none with this. The reason is, divine grace elevates, expands, and sublimates the soul of man. He who has drank into the spirit of the gospel is superior to a base action, and delights in offices of kindness and love. Ought you not then, Christians, this being your nature, to treat heavenly with the same liberality you do earthly treasure?

But the argument receives still greater force from a recollection of the immense *benignity* of your divine Benefactor. Has he who enriches you with this wealth, loved you so dearly as to redeem you with his blood? And can you be so unlike him as to deal out the riches he has thus procured for you with a sparing hand?

Yet—strange to think! We sometimes feel a narrow, penurious, frigid temper creeping upon us unawares, sinking us into the slumbers of self-security, defacing our high and noble character, interdicting our pleasures, and checking our exertions for the glory of God and the good of mankind. Instead of his word's dwelling *opulently* in us, it seems as if it had no place in us at all. And what makes this cold neutral spirit in the Christian the more inexcusable is, that it deprives him of even the little pittance of pleasure which the worldling enjoys, I mean that of contemplating the wealth he possesses: for when this unhappy frame of mind prevails, he forgets that the word of God is in him. Awake then, ye drowsy Christians, from your slumbers. Know that God has made you rich, and be, like him the Father of the family, and your fellow-Christians the children of it, of a liberal spirit.—And now you wish,

SECONDLY, To be assisted with some prudential directions for the management of this wealth. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly *in all wisdom.*

If a comprehensive view of our temporal circumstances—frugality in the management of them—care to defend them—taking proper measures to improve them—using and enjoying

them—applying them to the most benevolent purposes—and aiming at God's glory in all; if these are expressions of wisdom in regard of worldly riches, the like wisdom is required of us in the disposition and arrangement of this more noble treasure. Let me then exhort you, Christians,

(1.) To get a clear idea of the wealth you possess.

A wise man will have a rent-roll of his estate, an estimate of his property, an accurate account of his treasures. *He will be diligent to know the state of his flocks, and look well to his herds* a. He will not suffer his affairs to lie in disorder, contenting himself with a general notion that he is rich.

In like manner, possessed as you are of the Bible, it will be your wisdom to get as comprehensive a view as you can of its contents. Walk round your estate, mark the boundaries of it, consider the several parts of it, their extent, use, and value. Here you have histories, there prophecies; here doctrines, there precepts; here counsels, and there reproofs; here instructions, and there animating hopes, and consolatory promises. These should be considered in all their variety, connection, and dependance. And such view of them may be acquired by an orderly reading of the Scriptures, and a diligent study of their several parts. The Bible, thus becoming a well digested system of divine truth, will be more clearly understood, better retained in your memory, afford you greater entertainment, and be of more substantial use.

(2.) Squander not away your wealth on trifles.

It is lamentable to think what folly of this kind is observable among too many people of large fortunes. Their fancy is their only guide in the disposal of their riches. Every bauble they set their eye upon must be theirs, and like children they have no sooner got one toy, but they exchange it for another. So their wealth is of little real use to them, and their character for discretion sinks in the esteem of prudent observers.

Beware, Christians, of the like folly in your treatment of the word of God. If your time is spent in mere speculation,

a Prov. xxvii. 23.

in philosophising on divine truth, in attempting to explain mysteries not to be explored by human sagacity, and in developing questions of no real importance, you are trifling with your Bible, and wantonly throwing away the treasure which God has given you. Your character must suffer in the opinion of wise and good men, who will rather lament your folly than applaud your ingenuity. Your prodigality will impoverish you. Instead of growing wise, you will grow conceited, arrogant, and self-sufficient. Instead of enjoying solid tranquillity and happiness, you will have little other pleasure than is vain and imaginary. And instead of bringing forth fruit to the glory of God and the good of your fellow-creatures, you will be like the barren fig-tree a mere cumberer of the ground.

There is too a mode of treating the word of God in our social intercourses, which falls under the notion of squandering away our substance. He who is fond of talking and disputing about religion in all companies, without regard to the rules of prudence or Scripture, is guilty of this great evil. *Pearls are not to be cast before swine a;* nor are the great things of God to be discoursed of with the same indifference that men treat the common affairs of life. As the word of Christ should dwell in us *in all wisdom*, so it should be communicated to others in a discreet and reverend manner. If no respect is had to the time or occasion of religious discourse, to the sort of company with which we associate, and to the frame of our own minds, we shall be likely to do more harm than good, and to disgrace rather than honour our holy profession.

(3.) Guard this heavenly treasure committed to your trust against every attempt to deprive you of it.

A wise man will take every prudent measure to secure his substance from fraud and violence as well as the common accidents of life. And not a little discretion is necessary to this end, considering the depravity of mankind and the precariousness of all worldly things. How many in opulent circumstances have been reduced to beggary through their own sloth and folly!

a Matt. vii. 6.

In like manner, the Christian had need summon together all the wisdom and resolution he is master of, to defend his Bible from the insidious arts and daring assaults of Satan and his emissaries. We have seen how the divine authority of Scripture has been attacked by infidels, under the specious pretence of free enquiry. We have seen the Man of Sin, with the terrors of the sword, arrogantly claiming an exclusive right to this sacred book, and so robbing an infinite multitude of people of their just property. We have seen men of various descriptions, under various pretences, and with various success, tearing these venerable records to pieces, explaining away almost every important doctrine therein revealed, and obtruding upon the world their own vain and novel opinions as the infallible dictates of heaven. We have seen the Christian, through his own mistaken reasonings, and under the pressure of a gloomy imagination, upon the point of giving up his Bible, or at least his own personal interest in the blessings of it. And we have seen good men so intoxicated by the smiles of worldly prosperity, and so shook by the influence of ill example, as to forget for a moment this nobler wealth they possess, and suffer themselves to be reduced to the extreme danger of want and beggary.

Amidst all these assaults from subtle and powerful adversaries, not a little skill and fortitude is necessary to defend our just rights. It behoves us therefore to be awake, to have our eyes about us, to watch every avenue to our hearts, and to be prepared with every proper weapon to resist the enemy. The word of Christ, dwelling *richly* in you *in all wisdom*, will furnish replies to all the boasted objections of sceptics and infidels, and to all the sophistry of those *who walk in craftiness, and handle the word of God deceitfully a.* Study it, use your own judgment in reasoning upon it, compare it with the history of human nature, and the daily events of life, lay it to your heart, get an experimental acquaintance with it, and beg of God *to teach your hands to war and your fingers to fight b.* So you need not fear the event. With the sword of the Spirit in one hand, and the shield of faith in the other, you will perform

a 2 Cor. iv. 2. *b* Psal. cxliv. 1.

greater wonders than Achilles is said to have achieved in the fields of Troy.

(4.) Another expression of Christian wisdom, is to improve the property God has given us.

He surely is a foolish man who puts not out his money to use, neglects to cultivate his lands, and suffers his estate to run to rack and ruin. His neighbours of course blame him, and all prudent people conclude that he has no just idea of the value of worldly things. Some by economy and good management in a few years double their property, and so acquire the character of wise as well as rich men. Indeed it too frequently happens that this sort of wisdom pushed to an extreme degenerates into folly. The improvement, however, of heavenly riches is in no danger of being carried to an extreme. For the more our wealth increases the more we shall enjoy it, and the more good we shall do with it. So that avarice, which in regard of the things of this world is justly accounted a vice, is in regard of religion a virtue.

Let us then improve this invaluable treasure of divine knowledge with which God has entrusted us. Do you ask, How this is to be done? I answer, The wisdom which is from above will instruct you. The Bible must be studied, its doctrines felt, and its duties practised. In order to your affixing right ideas to what you read, it will be prudent, first, to examine the Scriptures unembarrassed with any comment, and then to call in the aid of preaching, exposition, and discourse with religious friends. Providence must be consulted in connection with Scripture: the one will throw a light on the other. The devout feelings of your heart must be daily tried by this unerring standard of truth. And to all these endeavours must be added fervent prayer to him *who giveth wisdom to them who ask it, and upbraideth not a.* These measures unweariedly pursued, your wealth will rapidly increase. In knowledge, faith, and love you will abound. With David *you will* not only *be wiser than your enemies,* but *have more understanding than all your teachers b.* And with Apollos *you will be mighty in the Scriptures c.* Your pound will become not five only, but ten

a James i. 5. *b* Psal. cxix. 98, 99. *c* Acts xviii. 24.

pounds; and to the talents you possess will be added many more, by way of gracious reward for your attention and industry *a*. Again,

(5.) It will be our wisdom to live on what we have, and to enjoy it.

No observation is more common than the extreme folly of starving amidst plenty. What a miserable wretch is he who abounds with wealth, and will scarce allow himself bread to eat or raiment to wear! Such penury makes a man contemptible to the last degree, leaves him without a friend, and exposes him to insult and ridicule from every quarter. He is an idiot, a cypher in the creation, or rather an unprincipled wretch with whom no one cares to associate.

Apply this reasoning to the matter before us. What is he better than a fool who has these riches, and yet lives in want and penury? The word of God is able to make us wise unto salvation. Why then do we reason no better about God and ourselves, about this world and another? Why is our dress so mean and sordid, our food so coarse and scanty, and our habitations so strait and inconvenient? Why are our countenances so pale and meagre, our spirits so languid, and our hands so feeble? Are we the *sons of a King, heirs of God, and joint heirs of Jesus Christ b? Why* then *are we lean from day to day c?* Why keep we no better company, and cultivate no more the manners of men of high birth and education, and of princely fortunes and expectations? The fault is in ourselves. We have the word of God, but, alas! want wisdom to use it properly.

Here I might lay down rules for such a prudent arrangement of these heavenly riches, as may render them the most serviceable to our spiritual health and prosperity. But as we have pointed out, in a former discourse *d*, the various uses to which the holy Scriptures are to be applied; and, in another *e*, shewn what measures are to be taken in order to our understanding them and entering into the spirit of them, it shall

a Matt. xxv. 14—30.
b Rom. viii. 17.
c 2 Sam. xiii. 4.
d See Disc. IV.
e See Disc. VII.

suffice here, in the language of metaphor, to bring forward again to your view the general ideas of their use.

It is much to the reputation of a man of wealth, that his mind is stocked with useful knowledge. Converse daily with this book, and your knowledge will wonderfully increase. The doctrines of this book will give you the most exalted ideas of the majesty and grace of God, and of the wisdom and equity of his government. The precepts of this book will give you a clear idea of the difference between good and evil, the beauty of the former and the deformity of the latter. And the histories of this book will substantiate all its wise speculations, maxims, and counsels respecting the nature, interest, and happiness of man.

A man of wealth is supposed to live in ease and affluence, without anxiety and care. You, Christians, have here the means of support and enjoyment. The best of food is here provided for you, such as will please your taste, and cheer your heart. *Man liveth not by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God a.* The truths, hopes, and promises of the Bible are the most substantial and delicate provisions an immortal mind can feed upon. Oh! if we had wisdom and faith to make a right use of the Scriptures, how would our hearts rejoice and our countenances shine! *Our table would be* daily *spread for us, and our cup run over b.* We should have *the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness c.* Like *the King's daughter* we should be *all glorious within*, our *clothing would be of wrought gold d.* This heavenly wealth would hold poverty, and with it gloominess and anxiety, at a distance from our habitation. *The voice of rejoicing and salvation* would be heard *in* our *tabernacles e*, and all around us would say, How happy a man is the Christian!

The rich are generally supposed to dwell in security; and indeed they are too apt to consider their wealth as a strong tower, impregnable to every attack. But however mistaken they may be in their estimate of worldly riches, it is certain

a Matt. iv. 4. *b* Psal. xxiii. 5. *c* Isa. lxi. 3.
d Psal. xlv. 13. *e* Psal. cxviii. 15.

the word of God, become ours by a lively faith, is a sure defence against the evils mankind have most to dread. Use it, Christian, with wisdom and resolution, and you need not fear the artful stratagems, or open assaults, of your most insidious and determined enemies. This wealth well managed will keep sin, Satan, and the world at a distance, or if they dare assault you, will quickly baffle all their attempts.

Honour is generally considered as the perquisite of wealth. It gives men influence and a power of doing good, and therefore entitles them to respect. Nor is there a man living so justly entitled to honour, as he who possesses these heavenly riches under consideration, and faithfully uses them to the purpose of the divine donor. His character, be the rank he holds in life what it may, is truly noble. Dignity marks his countenance and demeanour, and commands reverence from all beholders. Which leads me to observe,

(6.) That it is a dictate of wisdom to do all the good we can with our substance.

Riches come from God, and to him an account must be rendered of our abuse or improvement of the property with which we are entrusted. A wise man therefore considers, in the first place, that wealth is given him not merely for his own personal convenience and gratification, but for the benefit of others. And being of a liberal spirit he cheerfully falls in with the will of his divine Benefactor: for next to the satisfaction of pleasing God, one main part of his enjoyment is, the making those around him happy. His next question is, how he may best carry his views into effect? Here discretion is necessary. *The liberal man* therefore *deviseth liberal things a*, considers well who are the first and fittest objects of his bounty, in what mode and degree they are to be assisted, and how he may best manage his affairs so as to be largely and extensively useful. With a little prudence a small fortune has enabled its owner to do a great deal of good.

In like manner the heavenly riches are given the Christian, not for his own emolument only, but for the good of others. Persuaded of this he is anxious to know how he may acquit

a Isa. xxxii. 8.

himself with discretion as well as liberality. And here I have to recommend not only giving the Bible to the poor, reading it in our families, and, if we have ability, explaining it to our children and servants; but the prudent use, as occasion offers, of that knowledge and experience which we have derived from this blessed book, to the purpose of spreading religion abroad in the world. *A word fitly spoken is as apples of gold in pictures of silver a.* There is a mode of conveying instruction to the ignorant, reproof to the scorner, counsel to the doubtful, and comfort to the afflicted, which does as much honour to the prudence as to the piety of the Christian. *Walk in wisdom toward them that are without—Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man b.* If the word of God dwells *richly* in us *in all wisdom*, it will not only furnish matter suited to all the cases just mentioned, but will direct us as to the season, manner, variety, and the length or brevity of our discourse. In our private intercourses and public walks, in our own houses and at the tables of our friends, in the cottages of the poor, and in the circles of the great, we might be benefactors to mankind. We might instruct, entertain, and edify; diffuse knowledge, wisdom, and happiness far and wide. A most illustrious example our Saviour, who was the light of the world, has set us in this particular. What pity it is not more diligently copied by his disciples?—Once more,

(7.) The last and noblest expression of wisdom I shall mention is a devout regard to God our kind and generous Benefactor.

That man is poor in the extreme, be his wealth what it may, who forgets the fountain whence it flows. *Every good and perfect gift is from above c*, and he who feels not the generosity of the giver, and observes not the wise and gracious manner in which it is communicated, can have but little relish of the boon conferred. It is religion that gives sweetness to all our worldly enjoyments, without it they may intoxicate, but they cannot satisfy.

With how much greater force may it be affirmed of that profusion of wealth which the Bible pours upon us, that its

a Prov. xxv. 11. *b* Col. iv. 5, 6. *c* James i. 17.

coming from God is the consideration of all others that stamps a value upon it, and that the using it to his glory is the noblest expression of true wisdom and gratitude! There is no doubt intrinsic excellence in the Bible; and considered merely as a human composition it is a wonderful book. The history, morality, and theology of the Bible contain a fund of knowledge and instruction, and bear the evident marks of superior wisdom and sagacity. But it is the idea of its being writ with the finger of God that puts life into the whole. It is this that gives certainty to past facts and future hopes, clothes precepts and counsels with dignity and authority, inspires devotional exercises with liveliness and energy, raises doctrines infinitely above speculations and conjectures, infuses sweetness into promises, and casts a sublime and inimitable grandeur over the whole. In order therefore fully to possess and enjoy the wealth contained in this book, it will be our wisdom to mark attentively the hand that bestows it. Reading it, Christian, with the great God in full view, you cannot fail of being instructed, entertained and edified. At every step you take new light will break in upon your mind, and new sources of hope and joy will open to your faith. Your wealth will rapidly increase, and *the law of his mouth will be better to you than thousands of gold and silver a.*

It is wise therefore to inculcate this great truth of the divine authority of Scripture upon the minds of men, and it is wise to cherish it continually in our hearts. The deeds by which you hold your estates will be consulted with little pleasure and advantage, while you have your doubts of their authenticity. And it ought to be matter of no small joy to us, that he who has settled this better inheritance upon us, has taken care that the instrument of conveyance should have no one flaw in it. The broad seal of heaven is stampt in such a manner upon it, that the united powers of earth and hell have not yet been able to deface it.

The same wisdom too which teaches us for our own sake to observe the hand which bestows this wealth upon us, teaches us also to use it to his glory. It is an act of justice we owe to

a Psal. cxix. 72.

our divine benefactor, and indeed an act of justice we owe to ourselves. For such use of this wealth enriches the possessor. Nor does God give it to any, that is, possess them of it in the most important sense of the term, without giving them hearts well disposed to his interest. It is congenial to the nature of a good man most cordially to wish that God may be glorified.

Tell all the world then, Christians, of the liberality of your God. Hold up the immense treasures you possess to the view of men and angels. It is no pride to boast of these riches. That bounty which has raised you up from the lowest state of ignorance, guilt, and misery, and enriched you with knowledge, purity, and happiness; cannot be recognized in too strong terms of wonder, gratitude, and joy. Proclaim it with the sweetest accents of your lips, and with the yet louder and more energetic language of your tempers and lives. Preach, with the great apostle, *the unsearchable riches of Christ a.* Let your sound go into all the earth, let the voice of your instruction, influence, and example reach if possible the ends of the world. Say with increasing vigour, joy, and exultation, and so as to inspire all with the most exalted ideas of divine benignity, and with the most ardent desire to share with you in your wealth—*God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us, through Christ Jesus. For by grace ye are saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God b.*

Let us, my brethren, be comforted with the animating hope of that better world to which we are hastening, where these heavenly riches will be possessed in their utmost extent, and enjoyed in their highest perfection. *Eye hath not seen, nor hath ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him c.*

a Eph. iii. 8. b Eph. ii. 4—8. c 1 Cor. ii. 9.

The traveller, arrived at his home, sits down and with pleasure relates to his friends the story of his journey, the fatigues he endured, the comforts he enjoyed, the dangers he escaped, the advantages he derived from the map by which he steered his course, and the attention and faithfulness of his guide. In like manner, what unutterable joy shall we feel, on our arrival at heaven, in a recollection of the history of our journey, and particularly of the advantages we derived, in every stage of it, from the word of God and the power and grace of Christ! With infinite delight shall we join the rest of the family in singing the melodious song of Moses and the Lamb. *He led us forth*, we shall say, *by the right way, that he might bring us to a city of habitation a.* And hither we, *the ransomed of the Lord, are come with songs and everlasting joy upon our heads: we have obtained joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing are fled away b.*

In fine, may it be our anxious concern, and ardent prayer to God, that the *word of Christ may dwell richly in us in all wisdom*—that it may be ours—that we may on no account part with it—and that with the liberality and discretion of real Christians, we may apply this immense wealth to the purposes for which it was bestowed. So permit me, in the language of the apostle to the Ephesians, when he took his last affectionate leave of them at Miletus, *to commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified c.*

a Psal. cvii. 7. *b* Isa. xxxv. 10. *c* Acts xx. 32.

END OF DISCOURSES ON THE DIVINE AUTHORITY, &c. OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.

THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN RECEIVING THE CROWN:

A

SERMON,

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH

OF

THE REV. DR. JOHN GILL,

Who departed this Life, October 14th, 1771, in the 74th Year of his Age.

PREACHED OCTOBER 27th.

THE VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN RECEIVING THE CROWN.

2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.—*I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.*

Such was the triumphant language of an apostle, at the close of a tedious and painful warfare with the powers of darkness; just as he was giving the last blow, laying the vanquished enemy at his feet, and stretching out his hand to receive the rewards of victory. The end crowns the work. To enter the lists is brave; to stand the shock of repeated onsets is braver still; but it is the height of bravery to dare the enemy, in the immediate view of the last grand assault of all. Happy man, whose courage thus grew with his dangers, who deemed himself a conqueror when others pronounced him conquered, and triumphed over the king of terrors, when he yielded up his life into his hands! A more striking instance of the mighty power of religion is perhaps hardly any where to be met with. Nor is it possible, I think, to hear the apostle, circumstanced as he was, express himself in this manner, without feeling a persuasion that there is a truth in religion, and that this great and good man was really possessed of it.

It is generally agreed that this was his last epistle, and that it was written, as the postscript tells us, when he was brought before Nero the second time, that is, (as we may from several circumstances reasonably conjecture) when he was under sentence of death. Indeed he says himself, in the words immediately preceding the text, that *he was now ready to be offered*, and that *the time of his departure was at hand:* phrases that

very strongly express his apprehension of suffering a violent death, and that it was now very near approaching. He was *already poured out*, as the word is *a*, alluding to the custom of libations in sacrifices, and his departure was *at hand*, or *instant b*. So that we view him just coming forth, as it were, to execution, with all the solemn appendages of death immediately before his eyes. Awful moment! Men in common, and with very good reason, are greatly shocked at such appearances. Yet, here and there we meet with a person who, through a vehement passion for fame, or else by mere dint of fool-hardiness, supports with some appearance of resolution. But where is there an instance of any one behaving as the apostle did, with such fortitude, and at the same time with such composure and joy, on any other principles than those of true religion? He does not despise death, and yet is not subdued by the dread of it. The solemnity of the great event strikes his imagination, but it does not deprive him of self-possession. In short, what had past, and what was to come, afford him such quiet in the reflection, and such joy in the prospect, that the terrors of the last enemy, though perceived, are utterly incapable of shaking his resolution. And thus the noble declaration he had made to the Ephesians, when he took his final leave of them, he bravely resumes even in the article of death. 'None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God *c*.'

Now in the text, considered as the dying words of the apostle, there are two things which demand our attention:

I. The pleasing reflection he makes on his past temper and conduct; and

II. The full assurance he expresses of the rewards of heaven.

Each of these I shall explain and illustrate, and then attempt some improvement of the whole.

I. As to the apostle's past temper and conduct, there are three particulars he recollects with pleasure—that he had

a σπένδομαι. *b* ἐφέστηκε. *c* Acts xx. 24.

fought a good fight;—that he had *finished his course*; and—that he had *kept the faith*. And, in regard of each of these particulars, we are to consider him both in a private and public capacity; as a Christian and a minister.

FIRST, He had *fought a good fight*. The phrase is manifestly agonistical, and alludes to the games that were practised among the Greeks and Romans. And as it is general, and signifies any kind of strife or contention, it may refer indifferently to either of those exercises, wherein they disputed for the crown or reward. It will be proper however to confine our view here to the idea of a fight or combat. So the same apostle tells the Corinthians, that *he strove for the mastery*, and that *he fought not as one that beateth the air a*.

Now the Christian life is often, and with great truth, compared in Scripture to a warfare. And the enemies which the apostle had in his private capacity to contend with, were such as are common to all good men. No sooner do we become the disciples of Christ, but we enter the lists with sin, Satan and the world, very numerous, powerful and subtle adversaries. We wage war with the appetites, passions and corruptions of human nature, with flesh and blood, with principalities and powers, with spiritual wickedness in high places—enemies who would fain enslave our immortal minds, overpower the dictates of reason and conscience, carry us away into captivity to sin, and so plunge us in temporal and everlasting shame and misery. Time would fail me were I to attempt a description of the continual conflict in the breast of a Christian, between grace and corruption, sin and sense, his love of God and his propensity to folly and vanity: were I to represent to you the powerful aids which the evil passions of the heart receive from Satan, the god of this world, who is ever watching his opportunity to seduce us into sin; and from sensible objects with which we are surrounded on every side, and which have a mighty influence to draw us into unwarrantable and dangerous compliances. Time would fail me were I to remind you of all the secret gins and snares laid for the ruin of the Christian, which are not to be detected and counteracted without the

a 1 Cor. ix. 25, 26.

utmost vigilance and sagacity; and of all the open attacks made on his integrity, purity and piety, which are not to be resisted without great resolution, firmness and obstinacy: were I to recount the many bitter menaces of his desperate adversaries, the sudden and violent assaults they sometimes make upon him, the deep wounds he receives from their sharp and poisonous arrows, and the numerous discouragements, fears and sorrows he endures.—Such then is the fight in which the Christian is engaged, a sharp and bloody, a long and tedious fight—a fight that is not to be dispensed with, but at the peril of the life, the liberty and the happiness of the immortal soul —nay, a fight that will not admit of a parley, but should be maintained incessantly, from the very moment a man commences a Christian, to the very instant he passes into heaven as a conqueror. This fight then the apostle fought, entered upon it with great vigour and earnestness, maintained it with increasing ardour and resolution, and was now just giving the decisive blow.

But there were extraordinary difficulties he had to contend with in the character of a minister and an apostle, to which we may reasonably suppose he had his eye in this expression. Every Christian is indeed required, not only to look well to himself, to his own personal interests; but to defend the cause of truth and religion, against the contempt and opposition it meets with from a vain and wicked world. This he is to do, if not by public instruction and reasoning, yet by his influence and example. But the ministers of Christ are obliged to stand in the front of the battle, to meet the enemy in the gate, and to receive the first and principal shock. The most public and dangerous post is assigned to them. So that they, of all others, are *to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints*; and, uninfluenced by the frowns or flatteries of the world, *to endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ*. And how the apostle fought this fight, amidst peculiar circumstances of self-denial, temptation and persecution, I need not tell you. It was indeed, as to him, a bloody fight. Almost every kind of opposition he met with that can be imagined. From the time of his conversion to his martyrdom he was in one con-

final conflict. 'I know not,' says he to the Ephesians, 'the things that shall befal me at Jerusalem; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me *a*.' And this fight he maintained to the last, with unwearied labour and invincible resolution, surrounded on every side with the most powerful enemies, Jews, Greeks and Romans, men of every character, rank and circumstance of life, supported by the evil passions, prejudices and customs of the world, by the civil magistrate in many places, and by the powers of darkness. Nevertheless he was not intimidated. He did not yield for a moment. He prevailed.—But, before I dismiss this head, a little notice must be taken of the epithet he gives to this fight or contention, in which he and his Christian brethren were engaged. He calls it a *good* fight. And it is so on many accounts.

It is *a good cause* in which, as the disciples of Christ, we are engaged. The cause of God and truth, of virtue and holiness, of liberty and religion. A cause in which the honour of Heaven, the welfare of mankind, and our own truest interest, are immediately concerned. It is not a contention for worldly wealth, dignity and dominion, for the applause of men, or the uncertain and unsatisfying emoluments of the present life; but a dispute about matters of infinite moment—matters which have an immediate reference to our well-being here and hereafter—a dispute whether God or Satan shall have the empire of this world, whether truth or error shall prevail among mankind, and whether grace or sin shall bear sway in our hearts. Surely this therefore must be *a good fight*. It is a cause truly noble, and, in respect both of justice and importance, challenges all the disputes in which the bravest heroes, whose actions history has recorded, have ever engaged.

It is *a good fight*, if we consider at whose instance we resolve upon it, and under whose banner it is we are enlisted. Christ is the great and good Prince, who hath on our behalf declared war with sin and the powers of darkness, hath lifted up his standard against these mighty enemies, and invited us

a Acts xx. 22, 23.

to join issue with him, in order to their total overthrow and dispersion. He is our general, and having himself fought his way through unspeakable torments, sufferings and death, hath secured the victory to his followers. And surely that must be *a good fight* in which he has condescended to take a part, and the success of which by his mediation he has put beyond a doubt. *For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame.* He hath shewn us the way, and by being *made perfect through sufferings*, is become *the Captain of our salvation. Look to* him therefore, Christians, *the Prince* and leader *of* your *faith*; so will you acknowledge the fight *good*, and instead of being *weary and faint in your minds*, will wax bold and resolute *a*.

It is *a good fight* again, as Christ hath provided every aid and support needful for the maintenance and happy issue of it. Our enemies, it is confessed, are numerous and powerful; and we are of ourselves unequal to the conflict. But we go not naked, helpless and unsupported into the field. We are not left to our own prudence and skill, or our own natural strength and fortitude. He *the Lord of hosts* is *on our side.* Infinite wisdom and experience mark the path in which we are to advance, and lead us on to the attack; and almighty power and goodness sustain us in the fight, and command victory in our favour. He, the Captain of our salvation, *teaches* our *hands to war and* our *fingers to fight*; provides us with every needful weapon, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the girdle of truth, and the sword of the Spirit; raises us up when we are ready to fall; pours divine strength and joy into our hearts when we are about to faint; and either restrains the fury of the enemy, or makes us bravely superior to it. It is a confederate war. Heaven deigns to take a part in it: and the alliance on the side of the sincere Christian is so strong, that it is impossible the powers of darkness should prevail.

The company also with which we associate makes the *fight good.* All the men of God of every nation, kindred and tongue under heaven, are engaged in this war. It is an army

a Heb. ii. 10. xii. 2, 3.

composed of *the excellent of the earth.* Some indeed young and unexperienced, yet bold and resolute; and others veterans, of long standing, and who are capable of animating us by their example and success. Thousands have fought this fight; and though in themselves helpless and many times dispirited to a great degree, yet have come off *more than conquerors.* An innumerable company of confessors and martyrs are already got to heaven; and many, very many, have taken up the weapons they have done with, and are nobly struggling in the same cause wherein they have prevailed. 'We are compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses *a*.' Once more,

It is *a good fight,* in regard of the honours and rewards appointed the conqueror. Of these I shall have occasion to speak more particularly hereafter, and therefore forbear to enlarge here.—Well might the apostle then call it *a good fight.* Such he judged it when he first engaged in it. Such he acknowledged it to be even when in the heat of battle. And it is with peculiar pleasure he pronounces it such, just as he is stretching out his hand to receive the crown.—*I have fought a good fight.* To proceed,

SECONDLY, The same matter he declares in other words, or in a figure of somewhat different import—*I have finished my course.*

Running was another kind of strife or contention used in the Grecian games; and to this the apostle alludes in several of his epistles, as particularly where he says, 'Know ye not that they which run in a race, run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain *b*.' The rules observed in this exercise, and the manner in which it was conducted, we have not time to consider: all we can do is to attend to the general idea designed to be conveyed by the phrase. Without regarding therefore the reference it has to a contention or dispute with others, which should reach the goal first; we shall only view it as expressive of his having just finished—his course of life, as a man; and—his course of suffering, as a Christian and an apostle.

1. He had *finished his course,* was now got to the period of his life. "My race is run, and I am going off the course,

a Heb. xii. 1. *b* 1 Cor. ix. 24.

I have staid the time appointed me here, and must now enter into another state. My part I have acted, and I must now quit the stage, and make way for those that are to succeed me." But what was there, you will say, extraordinary in all this? The term of every man's continuance here on earth is fixed, and beyond it no one can pass. Such an acknowledgement has therefore nothing peculiar in it. True, Yet the composure, cheerfulness and joy with which it is pronounced, adds a kind of dignity and glory to the expression, which renders it justly deserving of admiration. With the utmost reluctance, if not anguish of mind, many are obliged to say *they have finished their course.* They would be glad if there were no end to it, or, however, if the end were a great way off. The thought of passing out of this life into another is most irksome and painful to them. But how different was the temper of the apostle! He considered life as a journey, and was glad he was got to the end of it. Death had lost its terrors, and he was not afraid to submit to it. A future world was become familiar to him, and he felt no surprise at the near approach of it. Nor was his willingness to die owing merely to the extraordinary troubles he met with, which might be supposed to put him out of humour with the present life, and so reconcile him to part with it. But it was the effect of a lively sense impressed upon his heart, of the superior joys and pleasures of a future state. This made him nobly indifferent to all the agreeable connections and enjoyments of this life, and to life itself. So, with a smile on his countenance, he says, 'I have finished my course.'—But by this expression he seems chiefly to intend,

2. His having completed his course of duty and suffering, as a Christian and a minister. This is what the apostle means when he speaks in the Hebrews *a*, of the *race that is set before us;* and, in the passage just now mentioned, of our *running so that we may obtain.* The life of a Christian is an active life. It is a disgrace to our character, and an affront to the solemn profession we have made, to sit still, and indolently neglect all further improvements in the divine life. On

a Chap. xii. 1.

the contrary, we are to 'give diligence to make our calling and election sure;' we are to 'examine ourselves whether we are in the faith;' to 'fear lest a promise being left us of entering into rest, we should seem to come short of it;' to 'work out our own salvation with fear and trembling;' and 'not having yet attained, nor being already perfect, to press towards the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus *a*.' We are to give the concerns of our souls the preference above any other concern, and to pursue their interests with greater attention and vigour than those of time and sense. And if this be our object, we shall pay a serious regard to the duties of meditation, prayer, hearing the word of God, and attending upon the positive institutions of Christ. There is also a course of duty to be run, which hath respect to the glory of God, and the good of our fellow-creatures, as well as our own personal advantage. We are 'not to live unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us, and rose again *b*;' and 'to seek not our own things, but those whereby we may edify one another.' Nor hath any Christian reason to complain that he hath not wherewith to serve God, or promote the welfare of society. For however slender our abilities may be, greater good may accrue from a faithful application of them than we commonly imagine. By our prayers, example and influence, however contracted our sphere of action may be, we have it in our power doubtless to serve our generation. Happy man who hath zeal and resolution enough to contend with the many difficulties and discouragements, which ever lie in the way of doing good!—Now, *to finish our course*, whether in the character of private Christians or ministers, is to do the work our Master hath appointed us, humbly, cheerfully and resolutely, and to persevere therein to the end.

In such manner the apostle could say at the close of life, he had acquitted himself; sensible at the same time of the imperfection that had attended his best services for the interests of truth and religion, and of the kind and seasonable assistance he had received from the almighty arm of

a Phil. iii. 12, 14. *b* 2 Cor. v. 15.

divine grace. With what meekness, humility, patience, cheerfulness and constancy, he ran his race of duty, and finished it at last, his history sufficiently declares. To that I must refer you, and forbear reciting the particulars of his almost incomparable example. Nor can I here enumerate the many grievous afflictions, temptations and sorrows, on which he pleasingly reflects; whilst in the near view of their happy issue, with an ecstasy of joy he thus triumphs: "*I have finished my course*—my course of suffering as well as duty. The pain, fatigue and labour I have felt whilst running my race, and the shame, abuse and persecution I have endured, is now just at an end. A few steps more, and I shall reach the goal, and seize the prize." Which leads me to the

THIRD particular, that he had *kept the faith.* Faith is sometimes to be understood of the *grace*, and sometimes of the *doctrine* of faith. If we take it here in the former sense, his *keeping the faith*, is expressive of his having maintained the lively and vigorous exercise of this divine temper all through his profession. He had *walked by faith, and not by sight a.* And *the life he had lived in the flesh* was, as he tells the Galatians, *by the faith of the Son of God b.* Nor was it indeed possible for him to have fought this good fight, and to have finished this course of duty and suffering in the manner he did, had he been destitute of faith, or had the exercises of it been weak and faint, and frequently suspended or over-ruled by sensible things. As faith hath the main influence in the spiritual life of a Christian, and is the root from whence every virtue and grace springs, so that amazing degree of it to which the apostle attained, accounts and can only account, for those extraordinary appearances in his temper and conduct.—By his keeping the faith some also understand his *faithfulness*; that, having at his conversion and his baptism solemnly entered into covenant with God, and with great sincerity and seriousness devoted himself to the service of Christ and his gospel; he had kept his engagements, and steadily maintained his profession unto the end. And such was his character. He had vowed, and he had not gone back. He had taken an oath of alle-

a 2 Cor. v. 7. *b* Gal. ii. 20.

giance to Christ his Prince and Leader, and no consideration could prevail with him to violate that oath.

But it is the *doctrine* of faith which I think the apostle chiefly, if not wholly, intends—*the faith once delivered to the saints—the gospel of the grace of God—the truth as it is in Jesus:* that doctrine which brings us the glad tidings of God's merciful design of restoring some of the sinful race of men to his favour and likeness, through the obedience and sacrifice of his Son, and the influence and operation of his Spirit; and wherein are given us such amazing displays of wisdom, justice, power and goodness. This doctrine, which he had not received of man, nor been taught by man, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ; this doctrine, which had been committed to him, as the servant, the minister, and the ambassador of Christ, to be faithfully dispensed unto others; *he had kept*, not suffered it to be wrested from him by the art or malice of false teachers, nor himself mutilated, corrupted or perverted it, nor on any account withheld it from others. So that his *keeping* it may intend,

His having faithfully preached it. This he did wherever he came, and according as the providence of God gave him opportunity. To all the churches he could appeal for the truth of it, as he did to the Ephesians, that *he had kept back nothing that was profitable to them, but had shewed them and taught them publicly, and from house to house, testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ* a. It may intend also,

His having zealously defended it. This he did both against the public and avowed opposers of it, and against those who secretly undermined and perverted it. He reasoned both with Jews and Greeks at Antioch and Athens, by word and epistle, at the hazard of all that was dear to him, and even of life itself. Nay, he was jealous of the least encroachment on the gospel, and on that liberty with which Christ had made his people free; *withstanding* even Peter himself *to the face* when *he was to be blamed*, and *not giving place by subjection*

a Acts xx. 20, 21.

to false brethren, no not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with the church *a*.—And it may intend, once more,

His sealing the gospel with his blood, which he had in effect already done, no consideration whatever having been effectual to prevail on him to renounce his attachment to Christ and the truth.—Thus had he *fought a good fight, finished* his *course*, and *kept the faith*. And now we proceed to consider,

II. The full assurance he expresses of the rewards of heaven. 'Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them that love his appearing.' How animating these words, and what divine transports must his soul have felt while his pen wrote them! You will allow me, for a few moments,—to descant on the description here given us of the heavenly blessedness, in which the apostle, together with the rest of the faithful disciples of Christ, was interested; and then—to touch upon the grounds of his assurance that he and they should most certainly possess it.

First, As to the reward he had in prospect; it was *a crown*—a crown *of righteousness*—a crown of righteousness that was *laid up for him*—a crown that should be *given him*—given him *by Christ the righteous Judge—at that day*, immediately upon his dissolution, and more publicly at the great day of account—and a reward which to his infinite joy, he should share with the rest of his fellow-soldiers, even *all who love the appearing of Christ*. If it be inquired,

1. What was the reward he expected? It was *a crown*, a figure by which he designed to convey an idea of the perfection, happiness and glory of the heavenly world. Various metaphors are used in Scripture to this purpose. We read of *kingdoms, thrones*, and *sceptres*; of *an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*; of *a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*; of *a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God*: of *a house in* which there *are many mansions*; and a *paradise* wherein there are *trees bearing* all manner of precious *fruits*, and *a*

a Gal. ii. 5, 11.

river of pleasure proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb. But here the apostle describes the rewards of heaven by *a crown*, agreeably to the practice of the Greeks and Romans in their games, to which he evidently alludes. To the man who prevailed, whether at single combat, running, wrestling, or in any other of the exercises, a crown was adjudged, *a leafy crown a*, besides many other honours. So, says he, having fought my fight, finished my course, and kept the faith, a crown shall be given me. I shall be declared conqueror in presence of angels and men, and be distinguished with all the honours and triumphs of victory. And a glorious crown that will be indeed which shall grace the brow of the victorious Christian; not a leafy, not a golden crown, not a crown composed of the most costly jewels that the cabinets of princes can furnish; but a diadem of celestial brightness and glory, and which fadeth not away.

Here I might attempt some faint description of the dignity, power, wealth and happiness to which the Christian shall be exalted in the heavenly world, all which are signified by this crown that shall be given him. I might tell you of that state of perfect freedom and uncontrolled sovereignty to which the immortal mind shall be restored, in opposition to that ignominious and wretched state of bondage to which, through the apostacy of human nature, it is at present reduced. I might tell you of the change that shall pass on all the powers of the soul, by which it shall be refined, ennobled and enlarged, and so become capable of the most exalted exercises, and the purest and most satisfying pleasures. I might tell you of the substantial and increasing joy it shall feel, arising from the immediate vision and contemplation of God, from an uninterrupted sense of his favour, from intimate communion with the blessed Jesus in all his glory, and from the friendship and society of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect. But after all, it must it will be acknowledged, if the Scriptures are

a The crown in the Olympic games, which were sacred to Jupiter, was composed of wild olive; in the Pythian, sacred to Apollo, of laurel; in the Isthmian, instituted in honour of Palæmon, of pine-tree; and in the Nemæn, of parsley.

to be credited, that the most animated description of the joys of heaven falls infinitely short of what those joys and pleasures really are. *For eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him a.*

2. The crown he had thus in prospect, was a crown of *righteousness.* By the most violent and iniquitous measures the princes of this world, many of them, acquire the crowns they wear. And the authority which their crowns give them, they too often abuse to the vilest and most tyrannical purposes. So that the respect to which the regal dignity intitles them, is the fruit rather of slavish dread, than of affectionate reverence and esteem. But it is not such crowns as these the saints possess in heaven. They are crowns of righteousness. Crowns to which they become entitled, not only through the infinite benignity and goodness of him who hath a right to bestow them, but in a way perfectly consistent with truth, justice and holiness. *Grace reigneth through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord b.* And thus hath he *declared his righteousness, that he might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus c.*—In like manner, a perfection of purity and righteousness is one main ingredient of the felicity and glory of the heavenly world. *As the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God d,* and *nothing that defileth shall enter into it e;* so all that peace, harmony and love, which are the inseparable concomitants of truth and justice, shall ever prevail there. In that blissful world there is no fraud, dissimulation or hypocrisy; no envy, malice or malevolence; no contention for power, wealth or dominion: but, on the contrary, righteousness, peace and friendship maintain an undisturbed and perpetual sovereignty through all those happy regions.—Again,

3. This crown of righteousness is *laid up* for the saints. Which intimates both the greatness of the heavenly glory, and the certainty of their secure and peaceable enjoyment of it. It is our most valuable treasure that we usually lay up with care, and in a place of the greatest safety. And who

a 1 Cor. ii. 9. *b* Rom. v. 21. *c* Chap. iii. 26.
d 1 Cor. vi. 9. *e* Rev. xxi. 27.

shall say what is the value of that treasure which is laid up for the saints in heaven? It was obtained for them at the expence of the precious blood of Christ; a consideration which enhances the worth of it to a degree beyond the comprehension of angels. And who shall doubt the security of it, since the same Jesus hath actually taken possession of it, on behalf of all his faithful followers? So that, for its value, it infinitely exceeds what the liveliest imagination can frame an estimate of; and, for its security, is beyond a possibility of being alienated or destroyed. It is laid up in heaven, and so out of reach of the envy, malice and power of hell.——To proceed,

4. This crown shall be *given* the Christian. It will be the fruit of the free grace, and the unmeasurable bounty of the blessed God. No one will dare claim it upon considerations of merit; that idea will have no place in heaven. Nay, it is a circumstance that will add brightness to the crown itself, and greatly increase the joy of him who wears it, that God of his free mercy thus bestows it upon him. O! with what gratitude will the Christian receive it, acknowledging himself most unworthy, and God most liberal, condescending, and good! 'The gift of God is eternal life *a*.' And as thus the free favour of God is the source from whence proceeds all the happiness of heaven, so with peculiar pleasure the apostle realizes this crown as given him,

5. By *the Lord the righteous judge.* Christ is the person he here intends—Jesus of Nazareth who met him in his way to Damascus, converted him to the faith, and commissioned him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles—His Master, Saviour, and Friend, for whom he felt the most ardent and unconquerable love, whose interests he had faithfully and affectionately served, and in whose immediate presence and company above he promised himself the highest satisfaction and joy. He is *the Lord,* the great Prince, *to whom,* as Mediator, *all power is given in heaven and in earth b:* who *hath the government on his shoulder c, and a name written on his vesture and on his thigh, King of kings, and Lord of lords d.*

a Rom. vi. 23. *b* Matt. xxviii. 18. *c* Isa. ix. 6. *d* Rev. xix. 16.

And he is *the Judge* who presides on this great occasion, to determine who are conquerors, and to dispense the promised rewards to them. And a *righteous* judge he is, incapable of erring through ignorance or partiality. So that the decree he passes will be agreeable to the strictest truth, and the most perfect justice; nor will it fail of receiving the universal applause of angels and men.

To the victorious Christian HE, then, will adjudge the crown, and HIS hand shall place it on his head. And O! who can describe the sweet mixture of majesty and grace which will beam from his countenance, whilst with soft and solemn accents his lips shall pronounce the joyful sentence? "He hath fought a good fight, he hath finished his course, he hath kept the faith.—His be the rewards of victory.—Well done! good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."—The apostle realizes also,

6. The time when this event should take place—*that day.* Immediately on his departure hence he knew he should be happy. To which purpose he elsewhere signifies his firm persuasion, that having given up the ghost, he should instantly *be with Christ, which is far better than to continue* here *a.* And, considering the solemnity of death, and the prodigious consequences that follow upon it, the time when it happens well deserves the emphatical description of *that day.* But it is the day of judgment, I apprehend, the apostle hath here chiefly in view: for this phrase he most commonly uses, when speaking in his epistles of that last great transaction. And O! how will the strangeness, variety, and importance of the events of that day, distinguish it from every other day whatever! On a sudden the great archangel shall sound his trumpet. The dead, roused by that tremendous voice, shall instantly rise into life. The Judge, even he who the other day expired on mount Calvary, shall appear in the clouds of heaven, with a countenance more radiant than the sun, and attended by myriads of flaming spirits. Before his tribunal every individual of the human race shall be summoned. Their characters shall be impartially tried, and their state irrevocably

a Phil. i. 23.

fixed. The sentence shall immediately be executed. Heaven and earth shall pass away. And so shall the scene be finally closed. Now on this day, and in the presence of this vast assembly, the apostle assures himself he should receive the crown.—To all which he adds the pleasing consideration,

7. And lastly, That others should be partakers with him of this glory.—The crown he will give *not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.* My time will not allow me to enter particularly into the spirit of this expressive character: or I might tell you of the Christian's firm belief of the second appearance of Christ; of his thoughtfulness about it; of his anxious concern to be in readiness for it; and of the joyful hope, with which he sometimes entertains himself, of his own interest in the favour and friendship of that great and glorious person. He hath not indeed as yet seen him with the natural eye; but, believing in him, his breast hath often glowed with a warm and affectionate love to him. And while faith hath sometimes presented this most amiable of all objects to the view of his mind, he hath rejoiced more than they whose corn and wine and oil are increased. And in this happy frame, hearing the blessed Jesus say in his word, 'Behold I come quickly!' with what ardent desire, with what longing expectation does he reply, 'Even so come, Lord Jesus *a*!' To persons of this character, whatever may have been their rank and condition in the present life, and in whatever age or country they may have lived, the Lord the righteous judge will give a crown of glory. Their crowns may not indeed, all of them, be equally resplendent: a prophet's and an apostle's reward will probably exceed that of an ordinary Christian. Yet they shall all be perfectly happy, all possess a fulness of joy. And this circumstance, I mean the felicity of other Christians, added not a little, such was the benevolence of his heart! to the satisfaction and pleasure the apostle felt on this occasion. Not I only, but others, many others, thousands of thousands whom no man can number, shall share with me in all the rich fruits of divine benignity and love, and in

a Rev. xxii. 20.

all the inestimable blessings purchased by the precious blood of Christ.

Thus have we distantly surveyed the transporting prospect the apostle had immediately before his eyes, at the eve of life, and when he was just finishing his warfare. Which leads me to consider,

SECONDLY, The grounds of his hope. He expresses himself, you see, with the firmest assurance of a future state; and of his own title to the happiness of it. He does not say, "There *may* probably, but there most certainly *is* a crown of glory laid up for me in heaven." With the like confidence he had before assured Timothy *a*, that 'he knew whom he had believed, and was persuaded that he was able to keep that which he had committed unto him against that day'——words evidently spoken with great coolness and deliberation. And however the text is the language of ecstasy and triumph, it is clearly distinguishable from that of enthusiasm and madness. For though the infinite splendour of those great objects, which pressed so close on the eye of faith, might well diffuse a rapturous joy through his soul; yet that joy did not deprive him of self-possession, nor render him incapable of reflecting on the sure and rational evidence upon which his hope was built. He had been a resolute opposer of the gospel, and a bitter persecutor of those who professed it. At the instant he was carrying one of his most bloody schemes into execution, that Jesus whom he persecuted had appeared to him, expostulated with him upon his impotent rage, and by a divine energy renewed and changed his heart. These facts he had invariably and constantly affirmed, giving the fullest proof by his clear and nervous reasoning, that he was not himself imposed upon; and, by his holy and self-denying manner of life, that he had no design to impose on others. And, more than this, in the immediate view of death, we see him triumphantly realizing the joys of heaven, as insured to him by the mediation of that Jesus whom he had once thus cruelly persecuted, but afterwards so affectionately loved and faithfully served.

And now what sober man, who reflects a moment on these

a Chap. i. 12.

things, on the character and life of the apostle, and his heroic behaviour in the prospect of death, can wish for more satisfactory proof than what results from hence in favour of Christianity? Nay, I will add, that man must not only be stupidly incredulous, but criminally averse to the pure and benevolent spirit of the gospel, who does not feel the force of such evidence. It *is* true then, that Jesus rose from the dead, that He ascended up into heaven, that He will quickly come again to judge the world, and that He will then publicly dispense crowns of glory to all those who obey his gospel. To the prophecies of the Old Testament, to the miracles of our Saviour and his apostles, to the nature and tendency of the Christian doctrine, to the history of its rise and progress in the world, nay, to the consciences and feelings both of good and bad men, who, having read the Bible, must have beheld their own characters clearly delineated there; to these authorities, to each of them, to all of them, I may appeal for the truth of these things.

Thus have we considered, as was proposed, the pleasing reflection which the apostle makes, at the close of life, on his past temper and conduct; and the transporting view he takes of the reward he was about to receive at the hands of Jesus Christ. It remains that we make some improvement of what hath been said.

1. From the account the apostle here gives of himself we may naturally infer, that it is no easy matter to be a Christian. Very slight notions, I fear, too many entertain of this sacred character. But, if the Scriptures are true, whatever encouragements the gospel affords us under a sense of sin, we may depend upon it 'the gate is strait, and the way narrow that leadeth unto life, and few there be who find it *a*.' We must rouse ourselves from a supine and indolent state, put on the whole armour of God, enter the lists with the powers of darkness, and be content to endure hardness as good soldiers of Christ. We must lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth easily beset us; and, girding up the loins of our mind, run with patience the race of duty and suffering which Provi-

a Matt. vii. 14.

dence hath set before us. In fine, having received the gospel into our hearts by faith, we must keep the precious treasure inviolate, and resolve in the strength of God not to part with it, even at the expence of our lives.

2. It is clear from the apostle's example, that the Christian, as he advances towards heaven, may be allowed to look back with pleasure upon his past temper and conduct, so far as they have been upright and commendable. No man took more pains than he to discountenance all appearances of self-confidence and vain-glory in matters of religion. The most distant idea of our meriting the favour of God, to which however human nature is very prone, he abhorred. Yet, sensible of the importance of personal character, and of the utility of self-knowledge, he every where presses us with great earnestness, 'to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith *a*;' and 'to prove our own work,' assuring us that 'so we shall have rejoicing in ourselves, and not in another *b*.' And however we are to direct our eye to Jesus Christ alone for our justification and acceptance with God, and gratefully to remember and acknowledge, that it is by his grace we are what we are; yet a recollection of past experiences of the love of God, and of our steady attachment to Him amidst surrounding temptations, will have a happy effect, with his blessing, to soothe our troubled breasts in seasons of perplexity and sorrow. In like manner,

3. The apostle's behaviour on this occasion teaches us, that it is by no means unworthy of a Christian, or inconsistent with ingenuous and evangelical obedience, to be influenced by the hope of future rewards. A desire of happiness is interwoven with our constitution. And our Saviour is so far from separating what God hath thus joined together, that He hath in the most gracious and condescending manner taught us, that our duty is our interest, and that what He requires of us tends to our present comfort and our future and everlasting welfare. Labour therefore, Christians, to impress your minds with this unquestionable truth, that you serve not a hard and severe, but a mild and gentle Master; and that, whatever difficulties may attend your profession, through the corruption of human

a 2 Cor. xiii. 5. *b* Gal. vi. 4.

nature and the unavoidable connections of the present life, *the ways of wisdom are* nevertheless *ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace a.* Set the crown of glory before your eyes which you are shortly to wear, and that will make you nobly superior to all the reluctance you feel at the idea of bearing the cross. And, above all, be persuaded 'to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of your faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God *a.*' Again,

4. How should a consideration of the bliss and glory, which our deceased Christian friends possess in the heavenly world, reconcile us to the loss we sustain by their dissolution! When those whom we have loved, and whose characters we revere, are removed hence by death, we cannot avoid expressing the concern and sorrow we feel. And it is fit we should. Christ wept at the grave of Lazarus. But while faith brings distant objects near to the eye, and realizes the exalted honours and ravishing pleasures our dear friends and relatives enjoy in that other state, undue passion will subside and a calm ensue. And it is our unspeakable happiness, that on this occasion, mournful as it is, we have every consideration of this sort to afford pleasure to our minds. The venerable deceased, for whom, I doubt not, there are many sincere mourners in this place, hath 'fought a good fight, hath finished his course, and kept the faith;' and is now possessed of 'a crown of glory which fadeth not away.' Great respect is due to his memory; and happy shall I account myself, if, while I am attempting to do justice to it, the grand end of this discourse may be answered, I mean, the improvement of this sad providence to the spiritual profit of all who hear me.

Dr. John Gill had the honour and happiness to descend from pious ancestors. He was born at Kettering in the county of Northampton, November 23d, 1697. His thirst for knowledge even in early life was so great, and his improvements so considerable, that at the age of ten years, as I am

a Prov. iii. 17. *b* Heb. xii. 2.

informed, he was able to read his Greek Testament. A neighbouring gentleman, accidentally coming to the knowledge of this, would have persuaded his parents to send him, at the proper time, to one of the Universities. But, as this proposal did not fall in with his or their religious principles or views, he continued with them: and by his own industry, with but little assistance from others, he quickly made very considerable progress in his studies. On November 1st, 1716, he was baptized upon a profession of his faith, and admitted a member of the church at Kettering under the pastoral care of the Rev. Mr. Wallis. He was soon called to the work of the ministry, of the great importance of which he was deeply sensible. In the year 1719, upon the death of the Rev. Mr. Stinton, he was invited to preach to this church, and early in the following year was ordained your pastor. In which office he continued among you the remainder of his life, that is, upwards of fifty-one years, enjoying the rare felicity of being scarce ever interrupted in his work by bodily disorder.

His natural and acquired abilities were very considerable. He had a clear understanding, a sound judgment, and an uncommonly retentive memory. In point of application and industry he had scarce his equal: so that he commanded a large compass of knowledge, and enjoyed a distinguished reputation for substantial and useful learning. With the oriental languages, Jewish antiquities, and the writings of the rabbies he was familiarly acquainted. And how well he was versed in the knowledge of the sacred Scriptures none who are conversant with his works can be ignorant. His merit in these respects drew the attention of the Marischal College at Aberdeen, and procured for him, in the year 1748, a diploma, creating him Doctor in Divinity. But, as he deemed it his greatest honour to be serviceable to the interests of religion, so this was the grand object to which he directed all his literary improvements. And if by these pursuits he was necessarily precluded from many social offices, to which he might otherwise have attended; yet that defect was more than compensated by the incessant and painful labours of the closet, to which for the good of others he cheerfully devoted himself.

Labours so prodigious, that it will, perhaps, seem incredible to posterity, that one man should have been the author of so many publications.

That he was a man of strict integrity I believe all will acknowledge. But though his steadiness was such, that, having come to a point with himself upon any opinion or fact, he was scarce ever to be moved from it; yet, convinced of his mistake, he was ready to acknowledge it. And though he knew how with spirit to resent an injury, he knew how also with becoming meekness to endure and forgive it. His warmth might indeed on some occasions exceed, yet he had prudence and resolution to check it; and failed not afterwards, like a good man as he was, to feel great pain on account of it. And however his inflexibility, his recluse manner of life, and the small share he bore in conversation, might perhaps excite in some persons an idea unfavourable to his character, in point of affability and cheerfulness; yet he knew how to be obliging in his carriage to strangers, and could be innocently pleasant with his friends: so that few left his house or his company, without some impressions to his advantage in these respects.

His religious principles, which were strictly Calvinistical, he maintained with great warmth—a warmth that proceeded, I doubt not, from a firm persuasion of their truth and importance. Yet, amidst all his zeal, which was accompanied with undissembled piety as well as unshaken integrity, he had a charitable and affectionate regard for those who held the grand leading principles of Christianity, though they could not agree with him in his explanation of some points. To exalt and magnify the free grace of God in the redemption and salvation of sinners, and to exclude all boasting on our part, were the grand objects of his discourses and writings. But the unfavourable consequences which too many were disposed to draw from his reasonings, he constantly denied, and warmly opposed: maintaining the utility and importance of good works, and indeed their indispensable necessity, as the fruit of the regenerating influence of the Holy Spirit, to the character of a real Christian. And, as he was himself most exemplary in his

conversation, so he heartily concurred in every measure to discountenance a licentious conduct, especially in those who made a profession of religion. What grief he felt when at any time Christ was wounded in the house of his pretended friends, as well as the joy he expressed when tidings of a different kind were brought him, his family and those who were intimately acquainted with him well remember, nor will the remembrance thereof be easily erased from their minds.

In the character of a Pastor he acquitted himself with great affection, fidelity and constancy. To the truth of this the tribute of real and cordial sorrow which you, my friends, now offer to his memory, affords the best and most natural testimony. His close attention to study did not indeed allow of his visiting you so frequently as you earnestly wished: yet his place in the house of God he constantly filled, as also in a weekly Lecture, which for near thirty years he preached, with the interruption, I think, but of three times. On a great variety of subjects, he largely insisted with the views I before mentioned; and which, with the blessing of God, proved the means of the conversion of not a few among you, and of the edification and comfort of many others. As he was 'allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so he spake, not as pleasing men, but God who trieth their hearts.' And 'being affectionately desirous of you,' he was 'willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also his own soul, because ye were dear unto him.' And, I may add, 'ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily, and justly, and unblameably he behaved himself among you: as you know, also, how he exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, (as a father doth his children) that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you into his kingdom and glory *a*.' Nor should I forget to remind you of what, as I understand, made a very deep impression on some of you, I mean the discourses he delivered, with more than ordinary life and energy, at the close of his ministry; and especially his affectionate address to you at the Lord's table, the last time he administered that sacred ordinance,

a 1 Thess. ii. 4, 8, 10, 11, 12.

when, as I am told, he was uncommonly impressed with the great things of God, and with the joyful and transporting prospects of a better world.

From that time, the beginning of April last, his health was very visibly on the decline, and he was himself apprehensive that his dissolution was nearly approaching. Some notes found in his desk on the subject of preparation for death, and prefaced with our Saviour's words, *Be ye also ready*, were written probably about this time. For though he was incapable through weakness of appearing in public, he was employed in his study, more or less, to the very last, or at least till within two or three weeks before his death. During his illness, amidst all the pain and weakness that attended him, he was never heard to make the least complaint, but submitted with the greatest patience and resignation to the will of God; sensible also of the filial piety and affection of his family, whom he ever tenderly loved. Nor was he only patient and resigned, but serene and cheerful. To a Minister who visited him, upon being asked how it was with him, he readily declared, "My dependance is on the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ alone, not on any labours of mine. I consider the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as equally concerned in my salvation. Nor have I any doubt of my interest in the everlasting covenant: this, added he, is the foundation of my hope." In much the same terms he expressed himself to another dear and intimate friend, mingling many tears with his tender and affectionate discourse. "I have nothing to make me uneasy," said he to another. And more than once, I think, repeated the following stanza out of Dr. Watts's Hymns;

> He rais'd me from the deeps of sin,
> The gates of gaping hell;
> And fix'd my standing more secure
> Than 'twas before I fell *a*.

Nor does it appear that his hopes and comforts were at all suspended or interrupted. Some of the last words, I am told, he spake, were, putting his hands together, "O my Father, my

a Hymn 82. Book II.

Father!" Thus sinking under the gradual decays of nature, he gently fell asleep in Jesus, the 14th instant, in the 74th year of his age.

Such was the happy and joyful exit of this great and good man, who having fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith, is now possessed of a crown of righteousness that fadeth not away.—It remains that I address myself in a few words to this audience in general, and to you my friends of this church, and the sorrowful family of the deceased in particular.

Death is the common lot of all mankind. It is the awful and just consequence of sin; and is to every individual the gate either to endless happiness or misery. Wherever it happens therefore, there is a loud call to all concerned to consider their ways, to examine their hearts, and to enquire what ground they have to hope they shall escape the tremendous consequences of it to the impenitent and unbelieving. But there is something peculiarly awakening in such providences as these, I mean the decease of so excellent and venerable a person as him, upon whose character and death I have been now addressing you. Surely, Sirs, there is a reality in religion: and those great truths, which the Scriptures reveal, which are the sources of comfort and holiness to Christians in their way through life, and afford the only effectual support to their hearts in the hour of death; these grand truths, I say, do deserve our most serious attention. How stands it then with us? Are we sensible of our guilt, impotence, and misery? Do we cordially believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can deliver us from the second death? And are our hearts by a divine influence formed into the love of God and true holiness? These are questions of the most interesting nature. Let me beseech you not to trifle with them. And O! may God, of his infinite mercy, by this event so fix your attention to them, as that you also may be ready to meet the summons whenever it shall come!

As to you my friends of this church, I am sensible your loss is very great, you feel it, you are deeply affected with it. But remember, though your friend, your minister, your fa-

ther is taken from you, *Jesus Christ, the* great *Shepherd and Bishop of souls, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* Put your trust in him. Offer your fervent and united prayers to him to repair this breach, by sending you a Pastor after his own heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. *Remember him who had the rule over you,* his instructions and counsels, his example and prayers. Be united among yourselves. Let fervent charity prevail in your breasts towards each other. And, while you steadily adhere to Christ and his gospel, let there be a noble emulation among you, which shall outvie the other in love and good works. And so may the peace of God dwell in your hearts by faith, and the comforts of the Holy Spirit abound there !————

And now, to the sorrowful and affectionate relatives of the venerable deceased what shall I say? I sympathize with you my friends in all the grief you feel on this sad and tender occasion. You have lost an affectionate and indulgent parent. And your loss is the greater, as it hath been your distinguished felicity, in the course of providence, to spend your lives in so intimate a connection with him under the same roof. But let not your sorrow exceed. Be thankful to God that his life was so long spared to you. Think of the bliss and glory he now possesses in the heavenly world. And, while you often call to mind the excellent counsels he hath given you, and are walking in the path he trod, comfort yourselves with the joyful and transporting prospect of meeting him again, ere long, in the realms of light and glory above.

A

SERMON

ON THE

DEATH OF KING GEORGE II.

PREACHED NOVEMBER 2d, 1760.

1 CHRON. XXIX. 27, 28.—*Thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem: and he died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour.*—

SUCH is the account the sacred historian gives, of the decease of David, one of the greatest and best of kings. In like terms also, will history record the mournful providence we this day deplore.—THIRTY AND THREE YEARS REIGNED GEORGE THE SECOND, AND HE DIED IN A GOOD OLD AGE, FULL OF DAYS, RICHES AND HONOUR.

But it is not in the cold language of an historian that I can relate, nor is it, methinks, with the indifference of distant times that you can hear, an event of such importance. He is no more!—What heart but feels a sound so sad and solemn! The Prince who long governed us with wisdom, equity, and moderation; who guarded our liberties with a jealous and watchful eye; who sought our happiness with a tender and zealous concern; who fought our battles, enlarged our borders, healed our divisions, and by the blessing of God on his counsels and arms, made us a great and prosperous people: the Prince who so reigned over us, as few had ever done before him; and extended his conquests farther than any of them could boast, not into distant lands only, but into the hearts of his enemies at home: What shall I say? This great and good Prince, the father of his country, the friend of mankind, and the favourite of Providence, is no more. Such reflections surely, would be too painful to a grateful and considerate mind, were it not relieved by the bright and pleasing prospects we enjoy, in his illustrious offspring and successor. Nevertheless even these, though they revive our spirits, cannot make us forget our sorrows; or discharge us from the debt we owe to the providence of God, and to his memory, on the present solemn occasion.

Soon to forget him is hardly possible: and to refrain from such public expressions of grief as these, is not only indecent

in itself; but argues a degree of levity, highly unbecoming a good man and a Christian. When Moses the servant of the Lord died, the children of Israel wept for him, in the plains of Moab, thirty days *a*: and so very affecting was the public lamentation for good Josiah the king, that when any extraordinary mourning happened, even for some hundreds of years afterwards, it was said to be like that of Hadadrimmon, in the valley of Megiddon *b*. We are not indeed under that extraordinary providence, which was the peculiar privilege of the Jews; yet our liberties, both civil and religious, do under God, so much depend on the will of our superiors, that it would be great stupidity, were we not duly affected with the mortality of princes, and were we not ready to offer the grateful tribute of our tears, in this public way, to the memories of those who have ruled long and well over us. The *Protestant Dissenters* have, I am sure, the highest reason to express such a temper on the present occasion: and if they have any sense of religion on their minds, and any remembrance—any feeling of the sufferings which their pious ancestors endured under former reigns, they will want no motive to excite them to it. It is, my brethren, the voice of God to the whole land: and the man of wisdom will hear it. May we be the men of wisdom, who hear the voice, who understand it, and who are made better by it! That this may be the happy case with us, I shall attempt some general improvement of the history before us.

I. I shall give you the character of David, with a short account of his happy and prosperous reign, and the circumstances attending his death. These things I shall

II. Apply to the present occasion: and then,

III. Make some suitable reflections on the whole.

I. We begin with the character of this great and excellent Prince, and the circumstances of his reign and death, as they are recorded in the text.

Of all the kings of Israel, the name of David makes the brightest figure in the Jewish history. His natural endowments, his religious character, and his princely virtues, were all truly admirable. On each of these I might particularly

a Deut. xxxiv. 8. *b* Zech. xii. 11.

enlarge. I might speak of his person, which the historian tells us was fair and comely; of his genius, which was bright and enterprising; of his natural disposition, which was humane, generous, and condescending; and of his exalted piety, wherein he excelled most others, and of which his writings furnish us a lively and convincing proof. I might speak of the extraordinary and supernatural gifts bestowed on him, which have rendered his name so famous in the church of God; and of a circumstance, which, though it entered not into his real character, yet was the highest honour conferred on him; I mean, that the Son of God himself condescended to be called the Son of David *a*. But I forbear. It is in the character of a Prince we are now to view him: and we shall find him possessed of all those royal virtues, which eminently qualified him to reign over a free, a numerous, and a powerful people.

Wisdom has been generally first mentioned, as not only the bright ornament, but the necessary accomplishment of a great king. Herein David excelled: for, as the Scriptures tell us, he was *wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth b.* The manner he behaved himself in the house of Saul, his conduct when he ascended the throne, the measures he pursued amidst the various vicissitudes of his reign, and the precautions he took just before his death, respecting the settlement of his crown, all shew him to have been possessed of an uncommon share of sagacity and prudence. But, however superior his abilities for government were, he did not trust to his own understanding; but as he sought direction of God in all his affairs, so he paid a due regard to the counsels of those whose experience and influence gave them access to his throne. His wisdom, thus supported by the advice of his nobles, was accompanied with that firmness, resolution, and vigour, which contributed greatly to the success of his measures. What he resolved with deliberation, he executed with spirit.

But there were other virtues, by which these his natural talents for government were mightily improved and adorned—

a Mark xii. 35. *b* 2 Sam. xiv. 20.

virtues to which the courts of princes are often strangers. The principles of truth and justice were firmly established in his heart, and added daily strength and security to his throne, while his wisdom reflected a bright lustre upon it. *He executed judgment and justice among all his people a.* Nor was the administration of it confined within his own borders; but distributed with an impartial hand into the countries all around him. His faith with neighbouring princes was always held sacred and inviolable; for he was superior to the little arts of perfidy, fraud, and dissimulation: and whenever he saw it necessary to carry the sword into any of their borders, it was in defence of a just and righteous cause. So that the maxim he laid down at the close of his life, for the instruction of Solomon, was that by which he always regulated his own practice.—*He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God b.*

Nor was his justice so severe and unrelenting, as not to admit of the exercise of tenderness and moderation: for though the safety of his people, and the honour of his government, made it necessary that he should inflict exemplary punishment upon some; yet there were others, who shared the happy and unexpected fruits of his clemency and forbearance. It was a most daring affront that Shimei the Benjamite offered to his person, when by an unnatural rebellion he was obliged, for a while, to retire from his court at Jerusalem. He *went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust c.* But David, instead of executing that vengeance upon this insolent rebel, which he most righteously deserved, and to which he was urged by the pressing instances of his servants, makes this warm reply to the jealousy they very naturally expressed for his honour—a reply which shews him to have been a stranger to every cruel and revengeful sentiment—*What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? Shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? For do not I know, that I am this day king over Israel d?*

Nay more than this, his lenity exceeded: for, not satisfying

a 1 Chron. xviii. 14.
b 2 Sam. xxiii. 3.
c 2 Sam. xvi. 13.
d 2 Sam. xix. 22.

himself with those expressions of moderation only, which prudence and policy dictate, he nobly triumphed in the most diffusive acts of kindness and generosity. His breast glowed with love to good men; his heart felt the miseries of the distressed; and his enemies themselves were the sharers of his beneficence. How generous was his treatment of Saul, when a fair opportunity offered of revenging the injuries which that cruel prince had done him! *The Lord forbid*, says he, *that I should stretch forth mine hand against the Lord's anointed a.* A generosity, which produced an effect as glorious, as it was itself singular: for it gave him a victory which his sword could never have obtained—a victory over the obdurate heart of a most unrelenting enemy. Saul *lift up his voice and wept*, saying, *Thou art more righteous than I: for thou hast rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded thee evil. And thou hast shewed this day, how that thou hast dealt well with me: forasmuch as when the Lord had delivered me into thine hand, thou killedst me not b.* Yea so exact was his honour, that instead of exulting over the tyrant, when Providence had laid him in the dust, and thereby made way for him to the crown, he most severely resented the levity of him, who with a pleasant air brought him the tidings of his death *c*: and he very liberally rewarded the humanity of those valiant men, who rescued the remains of their deceased king out of the hands of the Philistines *d*. To which I must add, that ever after forgetting the unkindness of Saul, he behaved with the utmost tenderness towards his family.

The same temper which disposed him thus to act towards his enemies, appeared likewise in all those bowels of compassion he felt for the distressed. How patiently did he listen to the petition of the widow of Tekoah! and with what emotion of soul did he assure her that he would *give charge concerning* her complaint *e*? Not to say how his wrath kindled at the prophet Nathan's striking representation of the man who had cruelly oppressed his poor neighbour *f*.

a 1 Sam. xxiv. 6.
b 1 Sam. xxiv. 16—18.
c 2 Sam. i. 13—16.
d 2 Sam. ii. 4—7.
e 2 Sam. xiv. 4—11.
f 2 Sam. xii. 1—6.

A heart capable of such sympathy as this, you will easily suppose, must be formed for all the offices of friendship and love. A sufficient proof of which we have in the warm and steady affection that subsisted between him and Jonathan. He *loved him as his own soul:* and the necessity of his affairs obliging them for a while to part, they *wept* in each others embraces, *until* David *exceeded a.* Nor can I forget to mention the moving language that dropt from his lips, when the news was brought him of the defeat and death of Absalom his son. Although he fell in an action, the most traitorous and unnatural that was ever heard of; yet the tenderness of a friend, and the bowels of a parent, totally suppressed every incensing reflection, and obliged him to lament in an ecstasy of grief—*O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom: would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son b?*

Such was the humanity of this excellent prince: a humanity that did not in the least proceed from imbecility or weakness of mind, which, it must be acknowledged, is sometimes the cause of excessive tenderness and compassion, or however greatly contributes to it. No. He was as valiant as he was generous: and by the happy conjunction of these two virtues, which are indeed inseparable, and shed a mutual lustre on each other; he shewed a greatness of mind in which few have equalled him. No danger ever intimidated him, when the cause of God and his country were concerned. With what amazing resolution did he accept the challenge of the Philistine champion, who dared to defy the armies of the living God! and, though so very inferior to him in stature and military skill, how bravely did he conquer him at single combat! Nor was this the only proof he gave of his valour: for as he fought many battles, and in all of them seemed regardless of his own safety; so he justly merited the applause of the people, when they sung before him; *Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands c.* Nay, what rendered his courage the more deserving of this high applause it received, was the principle that animated it: for it did not arise from vain glory, or a prodigality of life; but from a lively

a 1 Sam. xx. 41. b 2 Sam. xviii. 33. c 1 Sam. xviii. 7.

sense of his duty to God, and from the tenderest affection for his country. He was the servant of God, and the father of his people. His breast was fired with a true zeal for the honour of the one, and with the most ardent wishes for the happiness and prosperity of the other. Animated with these motives, he was fearless of danger, and patient of all the fatigues and hardships to which constant action exposed him. Neither did he hereby contract a fierceness of temper, or an indifference to the lives of his people; which is too often the sad effect of a constant attention to war, and the calamitous scenes it necessarily brings after it. So far from this, that he refused to drink of the water of Bethlehem, because they who brought it him had obtained it at the hazard of their lives. *It is their blood*, says he, *God forbid that I should do this thing a.* The like jealous regard he also shewed to the liberties of his subjects, not allowing himself to encroach on their rights, nor carelessly permitting others to do it with impunity.

In one word, what completed his character as a good prince, was the strict regard he paid to the influence of Providence in all his affairs. The divine wisdom he earnestly implored, to direct his counsels: and on the divine assistance he firmly relied, for the success of his measures. To God he looked with humble confidence, when he girded on his sword for battle, and marched out against the enemy in the field: and to the same God he failed not to offer his solemn praises, when victory was declared on his side. *Blessed be the Lord my strength*, says he, *who teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.* It is he *who subdueth* the *people under me. It is he who giveth salvation to kings: who delivereth David his servant from the hurtful sword b.* Nor were the expressions of his piety confined to these occasions only: for it was the business of his life, to reform the manners of his people; to heal the unhappy divisions that prevailed among the tribes; and to bring the worship of God under the regulations which he had received immediately from heaven. Yea, so ardent was the zeal he felt for the glory of God, that though he was not himself permitted to build a temple to his name; yet he

a 1 Chron. xi. 19. *b* Psal. cxliv. 1, 2, 10.

earnestly wished the accomplishment of this great design, and made very large and expensive preparations for it.

Such was the character of David; such were the virtues he possessed; and in such manner did he reign over a great and happy people: God himself bearing this testimony to him; *I have found David, a man after mine own heart, who hath fulfilled all my will a.*

It remains, that I now speak of the blessings which the divine Providence bestowed upon this excellent prince, and which our text tells us, were *length of days, riches,* and *honour;* rewards, which, in those times, were very frequently and largely dispensed to wise and good men. Thus, when Solomon draws the character of Wisdom, by which he intends religion, he describes her, as having *length of days in her right hand, and in her left hand riches and honour b.*

1. Length *of days.* This was the happiness of David: and a very great one it was, since under that dispensation, long life was generally agreed to be a special mark of the providential favour of God. His reign was long. *Thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem:* and forty in all, including the time he reigned over Judah in Hebron. Some of the Jewish princes were called away by death from their thrones, almost as soon as they ascended them. But it was his privilege, you see, as it had been of several of his predecessors, such as Moses, Othniel, Deborah, Gideon, Eli, Samuel, and Saul, to possess the government to this late period. The length of his life also was proportionable to that of his reign. Seventy years he lived; a term, which we may reasonably conclude, he did not wish to exceed. Moses, the man of God, had long before his time observed, that *the days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we flee away c.* When his strength therefore began to decline, and the powers of nature fail, he could not but in these circumstances be desirous of ceasing from his labours on earth, and of aspiring to the active services and joys of heaven. With this temper

a Acts xiii. 22. *b* Prov. iii. 16. *c* Psal. xc. 10.

of mind he received his dismission hence; and to his unspeakable advantage, exchanged a temporal, for an immortal crown of glory and happiness above. Having *served his generation by the will of God*, he *fell on sleep a*. Again,

2. If *wealth* be a blessing, as it most certainly is to a wise and good prince, David was in this respect favoured above all his predecessors; and it is probable, above all the kings of the earth at that time. Some idea we may form of his riches, from the short account the sacred historian gives, of his people, his arms, his conquests, his treasures, and his attendants. His *people were like the dust of the earth for multitude b*. His army consisted of three hundred thousand men, the standing force of the kingdom *c*: and though he was not ambitious of power—a passion that has proved the bane of mankind, and the source of some of the most terrible calamities that have overspread our world—yet we may reasonably suppose, that his dominions were considerably enlarged, by the victories he obtained over the Philistines, Moabites, Syrians, and other nations. Of this however we are sure, that these his conquests brought a large accession of wealth to his treasuries. For so immense were his riches, that besides his other possessions, he himself says at the close of his life, he had *prepared for the house of the Lord an hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver d; and of brass, and iron, without weight e*. Whence it may be also concluded, that the trade of his kingdom was greatly increased; for otherwise we cannot account for the large offerings, which on this occasion the people made, towards building the temple. To all which, if we add the account given us of his servants, his treasurers, his counsellors, his generals, and the officers set over his store-houses, his

a Acts xiii. 36. *b* 2 Chron. i. 9. *c* 1 Chron. xxvii. 1.

d If we reckon a talent of gold at £4500. and a talent of silver at £375. according to the usual computation, the sums here mentioned will amount to £825,000,000. an incredible treasure! But the difficulty is easily solved, by supposing that the talent here signifies indifferently any *piece or mass*, of gold or silver: in which sense we find this word is used, Zech. v. 7. and applied even to lead.

e 1 Chron. xxii. 14.

castles, his vineyards, his flocks, and his herds, we must allow him to have been a very rich and powerful prince indeed. But more than this,

3. The hoary head of this great and mighty king was crowned with *honour* and glory. *He died full of days, riches and honour.* He was the man whom God delighted to honour; *who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob a.* Not to speak of the honourable mention made of his name in the sacred pages, as a prophet, as a good man, and the man after God's own heart; it is sufficient here to observe the renown he acquired, through the favour of Heaven, in the character of a prince. His *fame went out into all lands, and the Lord brought the fear of him on all* the *nations* round about *b.* He honoured him likewise in the eyes of his own people: for sure no king was ever held in higher veneration by his subjects, than he was. *All Israel and Judah loved him c.* Nay, such was the warmth of their affection for him, that on one occasion they publicly declared, *Thou art worth ten thousand of us d.* So indeed they might well express themselves, when they reflected what various and rich blessings through his means they enjoyed; how he had fought their battles; saved them from their enemies; enlarged their borders; united their tribes: and, by the favour of Providence, made them the most happy and prosperous people under the sun. Nor did they thus love and honour him in his life only. He was the father of his country: as such they considered him, and as such therefore they most sincerely and affectionately deplored his death. His advanced age, though it rendered the event the less sudden and unexpected, did not in the least detract from their tender regard to his memory; but rather increased, as it most justly ought to do, their veneration for it. O what tears of sad and genuine sorrow must a grateful people shed at the tomb of such a prince! and with what emotion of soul, may we suppose they expressed themselves, in the very words perhaps which he himself had used

a 2 Sam. xxiii. 1. *b* 1 Chron. xiv. 17.
c 1 Sam. xviii. 16. *d* 2 Sam. xviii. 3.

at the grave of Abner—*This day a prince and a great man is fallen in Israel a!*

Thus *died David* the king *in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour.* But when David died, did the hopes of Israel die with him? No. By the favour of God, *Solomon his son reigned in his stead*—a son who, though of a tender age, inherited his father's virtues; his wisdom, riches, and honour: and under whom they enjoyed a long, a happy, and an undisturbed peace, which was the fruit of David's heroic valour, and of his active and prudent counsels. A prospect this, which, as it administered great comfort to the good old king in his last moments; so might well serve to alleviate the grief of his afflicted people, while they were publicly lamenting his loss.

Having thus attempted the character of David, and given you some brief account of his happy and prosperous reign, and of the circumstances attending his death; I come now

II. To apply what has been said to the present mournful occasion.

A mournful occasion I call it; for so duty and affection oblige me to express myself: and such I am persuaded you feel it. What man of a public spirit, and an ingenuous mind, but must be deeply affected with the loss we this day sustain! His advanced age has indeed in some sort prepared us for the event: the numerous offspring he has left behind him, has happily secured us from the fears that have been often felt on these occasions: and the bright prospects we enjoy in his illustrious Grandson, who now possesses his crown, have very justly raised our sinking spirits, and spread a joyful air over our countenances. But these circumstances, as they may be reasonably supposed to increase the regard we owe to his memory; so, by relieving our minds of the excessive grief we should otherwise endure, they the better enable us to pay this just and natural tribute to it.

Flattery is I know never so much to be suspected, as when the characters of princes are attempted. But were we guilty of an excess, while we are reciting his virtues, we have an ex-

a 2 Sam. iii. 38.

cuse to offer, which has frequently been admitted in instances of private friendship; I mean, a partiality which natural affection almost necessarily induces. For we this day mourn the death of a parent—a king, who has been a nursing father to our Israel; and who has long since merited the precedence of all other princes, both in respect of the mildness, justice, and wisdom of his administration, and of the honour, happiness, and prosperity, by which Providence has distinguished his reign. Look around you, and say, where among all the monarchs that rule on our earth, is his equal. Look back into the history of former times, and say, which of his predecessors, without detracting from the merit of any of them, has swayed the sceptre for so many years, with such reputation to himself, and such advantage to his subjects, as he has done. Shall foreigners envy us our felicity; and posterity recount the blessings we enjoy? and shall we remain wholly insensible of them? Shall they describe the virtues of our king, and record the actions he has done? and shall we who have both known and felt the happy influence of them, pass them over in silence and death? No. This is an ingratitude very ill becoming the profession we make; and which in the Jews of old was very severely punished by Heaven. But there is a higher motive than that of the justice due to our deceased king, to awaken our attention to this important event. The relation that subsists between princes and their subjects, God has himself established: and when he calls them from their thrones, and thereby dissolves our connections with them; he solemnly commands us to reflect seriously on their conduct towards us, on the blessings we have received through their means, and the loss we sustain by their death.

The royal virtues of our late Sovereign you have anticipated, while I have been describing those of David: and I doubt not, but you have been struck with the similarity of many circumstances in the reign and the decease, both of the one and the other. If wisdom, steadiness, justice, moderation, valour, a love of his country, and a regard to the providence of God in all his affairs; if these were the virtues that formed the character of David, I am sure we may without flattery affirm, that

we have a happy resemblance of him in the instance before us.

Whoever considers the nature of our excellent constitution; and then reflects on his foreign connections, the disputes he has been engaged in abroad, the rebellion he has had to contend with at home, and the unhappy divisions that formerly prevailed among his subjects; whoever considers these things, must needs admire that prudence, which has enabled him so to conduct, amidst all these vicissitudes, as not only to keep the firm possession of his throne, but to secure to himself the esteem and affection of all sorts of men, and with the blessing of God, to raise this nation to that pitch of glory, in which we now see it. The steadiness of his counsels, and the firmness with which he has pursued his measures, are notorious to all; and secure him from the least suspicion of timidity and irresolution. The whole world also is a witness to the sacred and inviolable regard he has ever paid to all his public engagements. While other princes have had recourse to the base arts of fraud and dissimulation, in order to compass their ambitious and unreasonable designs; he hath shewn a noble superiority to them all, and hath raised his character not upon the ruins of his innocent neighbours, nor by any of those violent measures, which an insatiable lust of power dictates; but by a prudent and just care of his own dominions, and a compassionate concern to aid and relieve the oppressed. Amidst all the infamy that falls on the head of Austria, for her base perfidy, and foul ingratitude; Prussia and his other allies will proclaim aloud, to all the world, and to the latest posterity, the fidelity, the compassion, and the generosity of GEORGE THE SECOND.

Nor has he failed to administer that justice to his subjects at home, which has thus governed his conduct towards his neighbours abroad. Neither blood, nor honour, nor interest, have been able to screen those from the punishment due to their crimes, who by disaffection, cowardice, or a neglect of duty, have betrayed their country; or, who have shed innocent blood. So strict a regard has he paid to that justice, the due distribution of which is as necessary to the happiness of a

people, as the exercise of clemency and mercy! The principles of equity, and the established laws of his country, have been ever the rule of his conduct. Nay, so careful has he been not to stretch his prerogative beyond its just limits, and not in the least to infringe upon the properties of his subjects, that in some instances, none have with greater difficulty obtained their right, than he has himself. His throne has been established by righteousness: and with the prophet Samuel of old he could appeal to his people, saying, *Whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed a?* Our liberties have been always dear to him: and, while he has given us the fullest proof, that he was incapable of offering the least violence to them himself; he has with the utmost attention guarded them from the attempts of all others. So that under our vines and our fig-trees we have quietly sat down, and cheerfully enjoyed the fruit of our honest labour: and the worship of God we have peaceably attended, according to the dictates of our consciences, none daring with impunity to make us afraid.

But it is not this negative merit only, by which he has endeared his memory to us. While he has thus held tyranny and oppression at a distance from his throne, he has made his crown bright, and his name illustrious, by the liberal and diffusive exercise of the positive duties of humanity and goodness. The subjects of those his foreign dominions, whose only law is their sovereign's will, can loudly testify this. They can say, and I doubt not they do it with tears of real sorrow, how happily they have lived under his mild and gentle administration; and what tender compassion he has expressed for the miseries they have endured, by the merciless devastations of their cruel enemies; and which have been their sad lot for no other reason, than because their Prince was our King. But we need not go from home to learn this. Of his humane and princely generosity we have sufficient proofs among ourselves. He considered all his subjects as his children; and like an affectionate parent, he most ardently wished, and constantly sought their happiness. The distressed he

a 1 Sam. xii. 3.

liberally relieved: and even those who had forfeited their lives to the laws of their country, were not beyond the reach of his compassion. The necessary orders for their execution, were always issued with a reluctance which shewed how sensibly he was touched with their folly and misery: and where mercy could interpose, consistent with the honour of his government and the safety of his people, there it was sure to be extended with the greatest alacrity and pleasure. The rebellion in forty-five, as it served to establish him on his throne more firmly than ever; so it had this effect, as well by the lenity of his conduct towards those deluded and ungrateful wretches, who fell into the hands of justice, as by the complete conquest his arms obtained over the rest.

The greatness of mind, which thus appeared in all his acts of lenity and mercy, even towards the enemies of his person and government, will leave us no room to question, that he was possessed of a personal valour, not unlike that of David himself. Oudenarde will say with what intrepidity he faced the arms of France, in his youthful days, fearless of danger, though his horse was shot under him, and a general fell at his side. Nor shall we easily forget, how he exposed his person, even in advanced life, on the plains of Dettingen; where he bravely asserted the injured rights of his country, and liberally reaped the fruits of his conduct and valour, in the glorious victory he obtained on that great occasion. Thus hath he fought our battles, and thus hath he hazarded his life in defence of our liberties. Such a prince surely deserves the highest applause: nay his enemies themselves cannot fail to contribute their part to the honour due to his memory; since, while they have felt the just indignation of his sword, they have experienced the fruits of that generosity, which is the noblest proof of real valour. For we have seen him, out of his tender compassion for the miseries of mankind, amidst all the amazing successes with which Providence has crowned his arms, making overtures of peace to those, who as they had no claim to such generosity, so considering the desperate state of their affairs, had little reason to expect it. A generosity this, unknown to the generality of princes, whose only motive to

war is ambition, and who promise themselves no other rewards, than the spoils of their innocent neighbours.

In one word; that which completes his character, and adds the brightest lustre to it, is the religious regard he has ever paid to the influence of heaven in all his affairs. The settlement of the *Protestant succession* in his illustrious house, was an event wherein the hand of Providence signally appeared: nor did he forget to express his sense of this, when it first took effect in the peaceable accession of his royal father to the crown and dignity of these realms. During the several vicissitudes of his reign, we have seen him publicly implore the direction and blessing of Almighty God: and when victory has declared itself on his side, we have heard him with great reverence and gratitude ascribe praise to the same God, saying, in the language of David, whom he imitated in this as well as his other virtues, *I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me: but thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us a.*

Such was the character of this great and excellent prince; I should rather say, such are the outlines of his character, and so nearly, even in this general view of him, did he resemble David himself. Nor is the similarity less obvious in the circumstances mentioned in our text. *Length of days, riches, and honour*, were the liberal rewards they each enjoyed. Seventy and seven years *b* he lived, an age which exceeded even that of David: and thirty and three years he reigned, a period which few of his ancestors attained. His riches, I need not tell you, were far more considerable than any British monarch before him ever possessed. Of this, his numerous fleets and armies, his large acquisitions abroad, the prodigious trade of his people to all parts of the world, and the amazing supplies that have been yearly raised for defraying the expences of the present war, are a sufficient proof. All which instances of his greatness, have not failed to awaken the astonishment of Europe, and to command that respect from foreign powers, to which the favour of Providence hath justly intitled him. The cheerfulness also, with which his people have thus contributed

a Psal. xliv. 6, 7. *b* Within sixteen days.

to the support of the just and prudent measures of his administration, and the unanimity that has happily prevailed among them, as they have secured the highest reputation to his government, in the view of all the world; so they have shewn him to be possessed of the hearts of his subjects—an honour which every good king will account the greatest, next to the favour of God himself. With truth therefore it may be affirmed of him, that *he died in a good old age, full of days, riches and honour.*

Happy Prince! Thus raised up by God, to humble the pride and restrain the power of haughty tyrants; to assist his oppressed neighbours against the violent attempts of Popish enemies; and, like a tender father, to guard the liberties, and promote the interests, of a dutiful and affectionate people. May his name ever live, not in the records of history only; but in the hearts of all those who have felt the blessings of his just, mild, and gracious administration!

But, while we thus lament his loss, let us remember that he, as well as David, has left a successor on his throne of fair and promising expectations—a Prince who we trust inherits, not the dominions only; but the virtues of his Royal Ancestor: and who appears in this high station, with this advantage above most of his predecessors, that he has been trained to government under the reign of the best of Kings, and been formed to the duties of humanity and goodness, under the instructions of the best of Princesses—A Princess, whose name will shine in history, with this additional lustre to all her excellent qualifications, that through the favour of Heaven she is the royal mother of GEORGE THE THIRD.

To him the princes, and the mighty men, and the sons of the king, and all the people, have submitted themselves; as they did to Solomon of old *a*. Nor will they, I hope, forget to offer the like fervent prayers to heaven on his behalf which ascended from the lips of Israel and Judah on that occasion *b*. *Give thy judgments, O God, to the king, and thy righteousness* to him that ruleth over us. Let him *judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment.* Let him

a 1 Chron. xxix. 23, 24. *b* Psal. lxxii.

save the children of the needy; and break in pieces the oppressor. Let him *come down like rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. In his days* let the *righteous flourish; and* let there be *an abundance of peace* in our land. And since, through thy blessing on the arms of our late sovereign, thou hast given him *dominion from sea to sea,* hast made them *that dwell in the wilderness bow before him,* and *his enemies lick the dust* of his feet; let *the kings* of the earth acknowledge his power, and his people *offer* him the cheerful *tribute* of a dutiful and constant obedience. Let *prayer may be made continually for him:* and let him reign with wisdom, equity, and moderation: and with increasing happiness, splendour, and prosperity, to the latest period.

It remains that I now close what has been said,

III. With two or three reflections.

1. How great a blessing is a good King! a Prince of a wise, honest, and generous heart; who fears God, and loves his people! Such, surely, do most justly merit our highest esteem, and our warmest gratitude; since, by their hands, Providence dispenses to us the blessings of peace and plenty; since he appoints them the guardians of our lives and liberties; and since knowledge and virtue flourish chiefly, through the encouragement they receive from their influence and example. What an unspeakable privilege this is, we have learnt, not by mere speculation, the only way in which most countries conceive of it; but by experience; for we have been the happy people, who have seen, felt, and enjoyed this great blessing. O what thankfulness should possess all our hearts; especially theirs, who have any sense of religion impressed on their spirits! Can we read of the cruelties exercised in some former reigns, and hear of the miseries which our Protestant brethren abroad suffer, for the sake of God and a good conscience; and not feel in our breasts every sentiment of gratitude, that can be conceived, to that infinitely good God who has cast our lot in this happy island, and given us existence in so bright an æra of the British history? May we ever retain a due sense of these things on our minds, and constantly express it, by the most cheerful and loyal obedience to our great

and excellent Sovereign! As *we fear God* let us *honour the king a*: and ever *lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty b.*

2. From what has been said we are naturally led to reflect on the vanity of the world. How uncertain, how transitory, are all present enjoyments! Death holds an universal empire: his dominion reaches over the whole earth. He inhabits every place; knocks in his turn at every door; and obliges every creature to submit to his authority. Princes, you see, with all their power, and wealth, and policy, cannot bribe him; nor is the poorest peasant beneath his notice. The fairest palace cannot shut him out; nor does the meanest cottage pass unobserved. *The fathers where are they?* The kings *do they live for ever c?* Where are the heroes of ancient times, that gave laws to the whole world, and carried their arms into the most distant parts of it? Their wisdom, their fame, their power, could not make them immortal. Those lips which have spoke truth, and peace, and goodness from the throne, are closed in silence and death: and those hands, that have wielded the sword to the terror of thousands, are become inactive in the dark and cold grave. Such ere long will be our lot. Happy they who are prepared for this great event! Happy they who are formed into a noble indifference to the uncertain enjoyments of this world! Thrice happy they, who in the joyful expectations of a better state, can triumph over the last enemy in the language of an apostle! *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ d.* In one word,

3. Is the breath of kings in their nostrils; and do they possess their crowns on the uncertain tenure of human life? Let us learn then *not* to *put* our *trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help.* Their *breath goeth forth,* they *return to* the *earth: in that very day* their *thoughts perish e.* But there is a God who liveth for ever, and whose

a 1 Pet. ii. 17. *b* 1 Tim. ii. 2. *c* Zech. i. 5.
d 1 Cor. xv. 55—57. *e* Psal. cxlvi. 3, 4.

dominion endureth unto all generations. On him may our confidence be immoveably fixed, while we rejoice in the power and grace of Jesus his Son, who, when all the grandeur of this world hath vanished away, shall reign happy and glorious, amidst the never-ceasing praises of those, whom he hath *redeemed by* his *blood, and made kings and priests unto God* for evermore *a*.

a Rev. v. 9, 10.

THE VARIOUS USE OF AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE IN MATTERS OF RELIGION:

A

SERMON

PREACHED TO THE

MINISTERS AND MESSENGERS

OF

SEVERAL ASSOCIATED CHURCHES, AT HORSLEY, IN THE COUNTY OF GLOUCESTER,

JUNE 13th, 1764.

THE VARIOUS USE OF AUTHORITY AND EXPERIENCE IN MATTERS OF RELIGION.

JOHN IV. 41, 42.—*And many more believed, because of his own word: and said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*

RELIGION, at least the profession of it, takes its rise either from *Authority* or *Experience*. By *Authority* is meant the opinion and testimony of others: and by *Experience* the dictate of a man's own judgment, and the feelings of his own heart. Each of these principles or evidences of religion, if they may be so called, it is proposed now to consider; to inquire into their various and proper use; and by comparing them, to shew the preference which should be given the latter before the former; and indeed the infinite importance, and indispensable necessity of it.—To this design the words of our text very naturally lead us.

The woman of Samaria, having it seems been converted by the preaching of Christ, hastens away to her neighbours and acquaintance, and reporting to them what had happened, intreats them to come immediately to hear him. The Samaritans fell in with her request, and having themselves heard the Saviour, are also converted and become his disciples. Upon which they make the reflection in the text, *Now we believe, not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.* Here then we will briefly examine,

FIRST, The report which the woman makes to the Samaritans, and the attention they pay to it; which is what may be called *Authority:* And,

SECONDLY, The effect of this, their hearing Christ themselves, and so becoming his disciples; which is what answers to *Experience.*

FIRST, As to the report the woman of Samaria brought, it was in short this: "That having been to draw water at a well without the city, she had there met with a very extraordinary person a Jew; that he had entered into a long discourse with her, wherein, besides the account he had given her of the nature of religion, he had made such discoveries to her of the secrets of her heart and life, as abundantly convinced her that he was a prophet, yea no less a person than the Messiah or Saviour who should come; and that therefore she earnestly wished they would immediately go out of the town to him, as she made no doubt but they would reap the same salutary advantages from his instructions which she had done." Now the question is, what regard did it behove the Samaritans, in their circumstances, to pay to this story? To have treated it with ridicule and contempt would certainly have been most irrational, not to say rude and indecent; since there were many high probabilities of the truth of it: and admitting it to have been true, it was manifestly an affair of the utmost importance. And on the other hand, to have so rested their faith on this woman's report, as implicitly to have believed what she said, without making any farther inquiry into it, would have been a temper and conduct equally absurd and dangerous: nay it would have been in effect to defeat the very end for which she brought them the story. A summary view then,

1. Of the probabilities of this extraordinary relation, will very well account for the attention they paid to it: and a view,

2. Of the difficulties that attended it, will sufficiently justify their withholding a full assent to it, till such time as they had themselves heard Christ, or had received the immediate and lively impressions of his grace on their hearts.

1. The probabilities of the story were very strong. The woman they knew: she was their acquaintance, their neighbour, and their friend. That she had been at the well, and met with a Jew there, was not at all unlikely. That he was a

prophet, yea the Messiah himself, was not impossible; for he was expected about that time, and it was the opinion of many, whatever might be *their* national prejudices, that he would come of the Jews. And moreover that he actually was the Messiah, seemed a natural inference from what the woman reported concerning him; provided her testimony was authentic, and might be depended upon. For though she pretended not that he had performed any external miracles; yet she affirmed that he had done what was perhaps more extraordinary, that he had *told her all things that ever she did a.* The conclusion therefore was just and natural, that he was a prophet, yea more than a prophet, even Christ the Son of God: for who can penetrate into the hearts of men, and bring to light all the secret actions of their lives, but he who possesses divine knowledge and perfection? And of the truth of the fact, that he did *tell her all things that ever she had done,* whence she drew the inference, there was the highest probability, if not moral certainty. It was an affair in which she was neither likely to be deceived herself, or to have any intent to deceive others. She must know whether this person did or did not reveal to her what lay concealed in her breast: no great discernment was necessary to qualify her to become a proper witness of this. And that she had no design to deceive seemed as evident: for she could propose no advantage to herself by the imposition, but rather the reverse; since in giving this testimony concerning Jesus, she reflected highly on her own innocence and virtue, and humbly acknowledged herself one of the chief of sinners. And then the manner of her relating the story, the surprise, eagerness, and concern that appeared in her countenance, all argued her sincerity. Nay what put it beyond any reasonable dispute, was her inviting them to come to the well to see him: for this was resting the trial of her testimony upon the fullest and fairest issue imaginable. Now these reflections, which the Samaritans could hardly avoid making, must have rendered her story highly probable.

What then was the proper use of it? Why, It prevented their treating her and the message she brought them with ri-

a Ver. 29.

dicule and contempt. Had there been no marks of truth upon it, or however had there been nothing of importance in it, they would have been justified in turning their backs upon her, either as an idle silly woman, or as one who had framed a design to deceive. But the contrary of this being the case, though still they must be supposed to have had their doubts, they were effectually secured from a trifling and indecent behaviour.

The probability of the story was a reason also for their inquiring into it. And indeed it was for this end that she related it. She did not desire them to lay a greater stress upon her testimony, than it would most naturally and reasonably bear. She did not wish them to believe that Jesus was the Messiah, and that his religion was true, because she said so. All she wanted of them was, to go and converse with him, and so to make trial for themselves. And there was every thing in the report itself, the circumstances of it, and her manner of delivering it, to provoke them to this. If the importance of any fact, if the probability of its being true, and if friendship for the person who relates it, may be justly deemed sufficient reasons to fix our attention to any matter; such reasons were all of them subsisting in the present case. It could not be denied that it was an important question, whether this was *the Christ, the Saviour of the world*; and if he were so, whether a great deal did not depend upon their knowing him, and believing in him. It could not be denied, as hath been shewn already, that it was both a possible and a probable thing that Jesus might be the person. Nor could it be denied farther, that there was some decent regard due to her as a neighbour and a friend. If therefore their attention had not been excited by these means, nor they prevailed on to go and see Christ, and to hear what he had to say, they had most certainly been culpable in a very high degree.

And then again, when they had been and heard Christ, and felt the power of his grace upon their hearts, the declaration of this woman served as a collateral evidence of the truth of the Christian doctrine, and had a happy tendency to confirm their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. They could not but re-

flect upon it with pleasure, as the instrument of their conversion; and from a comparison drawn between their *experience* and hers, derive a farther proof of what they now firmly believed. Such then was the proper use, in the instance before us, of that *authority*, which under the present circumstances, might be deemed human and traditional. Let us now on the other hand,

2. Consider the difficulties attending this very extraordinary story; which might justify their withholding a full assent to it, till such time as they had themselves heard Christ, or had felt the immediate influence of his grace on their hearts. Her report that she had met with Jesus the Messiah at the well, though highly probable, and in her own apprehension unquestionably true; yet to the Samaritans, who were at present only inquirers about the fact, could be but doubtful and uncertain. It was natural enough for them to reason thus with themselves: "True, she can hardly be supposed to have framed this story with a view to impose upon us: Yet she herself may have been deceived; her passions may have got the better of her judgment; and while she verily believes she hath seen the Messiah, conversed with him, and been exalted to heaven by his discourse, it may have been no more than an illusion of the brain, or a violent sally of imagination. Besides, we have not yet had time to see the effect of this unusual conversion, in the general course of her behaviour. It is prudent therefore, at least for a while, to suspend our full assent, and to wait for farther evidence from the discourse of Jesus himself; especially as she tells us we have now a fair opportunity of seeing him with our own eyes, and conversing with him face to face." In this reasoning there was doubtless some force; not to say how natural it was for a depraved heart to suggest many other circumstances, which might tend to weaken her testimony.

Supposing then the Samaritans to have gone no farther than this, their doubts were of real use to them. For such a caution prevented their paying that regard to human *authority*, which was due only to divine. It secured them from the ill influence of a faith, which as it would have been merely tra-

ditional, so would have produced no valuable fruit in their hearts or lives; a faith which would have been subject to continual fluctuation and change; and in short a faith which would have essentially injured them, by sealing them up in ignorance and sloth, and inspiring them with all the obstinacy of self-conceit, and with all the insolence of religious pride. From these evils, I say, this caution effectually secured them; while at the same time it disposed them to wish earnestly to come at the whole truth of the matter. And thus on the one hand, an assent to her testimony as far as it would go, and on the other hand, an unwillingness to rest their faith merely on her *authority*, produced the happy effect which the history mentions. They cheerfully fell in with her invitation: to Jesus they came: his discourse they heard: and, convinced by his mighty reasoning, and overpowered by his divine persuasion, they became his disciples. Which leads me now

Secondly, To consider the grand evidence upon which their faith of the mission and doctrine of Christ was built: and that was their own *experience*. *Now*, say they, *we believe not because of thy saying; for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.*

The matter of which they were to make trial was what the woman had reported to them; that Jesus was *the Messiah and the Saviour of the world*, Gentiles as well as Jews; and that his doctrine was capable of producing those effects upon the minds of others, which she affirmed it had produced on hers. Now as to the first of these; since Christ, it is probable, wrought no miracles in this place (for we have no account of any) the evidence of it must have rested chiefly on the latter, the effects which they sensibly felt from his preaching on their own hearts. If Jesus then did indeed 'tell them,' as he had the woman, 'all things that ever they had done:' If he did, by the mighty energy of his doctrine upon their hearts, humble them for their sins before God: If, whilst they thus lay prostrate at the feet of mercy, he did relieve them of their fears with the hope of pardon and salvation through his mediation and grace: If he did secretly and powerfully so impress their minds with divine truths, as to excite in them an

hatred of sin, a love of holiness, a delight in God, and fervent aspirations of soul after the pure and unmixed pleasures of the heavenly world: If, in one word, his preaching, accompanied with the all-commanding influence of his grace, did beget in them principles of love and benevolence towards all around them, and especially those who were their fellow-heirs of eternal glory: If such, I say, were indeed the effects of his doctrine on their hearts, these effects must have furnished a clear and demonstrable proof, at least to themselves, of the truth of what Jesus had asserted, that he was *the Christ the Saviour of the world.* The conclusion was so natural and necessary, that they could not fail of inferring it. The reasoning must have touched all the inmost springs of their souls, and with divine evidence have overpowered every possible doubt that could arise in their breasts.

Nor have we any room to question, that such were the happy fruits of this memorable discourse our Saviour held with the Samaritans. On the contrary, as it is expressly said, *They believed on him because of his own word;* so their behaviour towards Christ himself, and the manner in which they address the woman, sufficiently shew them to have been under the influence of that divine temper we have been describing. As to Jesus; if they had found what the woman had reported of him not to have been true, they would have been apt to have treated him with indifference, if not contempt. But instead of this, struck with his divine glories, and charmed with that fulness of grace which ran through the whole of his discourse, they behave towards him with the utmost reverence and affection, earnestly beseeching him to tarry awhile with them, that they may reap farther benefit from his heavenly instructions, and may have an opportunity to gratify the overflowings of their zeal and love, by offering him in person some humble tribute of unfeigned gratitude and cheerful obedience. And then as to the woman, to whom under God they owed this happy *experience,* of which they now found themselves possessed; with what lively and genuine expressions of confidence, admiration and joy, do they address her in the text! "Now we no longer believe for thy saying. That in-

deed we consider as the first mean of our conversion, and acknowledge our obligations to thy charity and love; but we have not, agreeably to thine own request, rested our faith there. We have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world." O the inward satisfaction, the heavenly pleasure they must have felt, while they thus poured out their hearts to the happy person, who first brought them acquainted with Christ! Every word seems to have been spoken with an energy, which shewed them to be under a divine influence, and to *have drank into the same spirit* which the woman herself expressed, when she left her water-pot, fled to the city, and in an ecstasy of joy cried out, *Come, see a man who told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ a?*

And here we might compare the evidence of *authority* and *experience* together, and shew in this instance particularly, the far superior advantage of the latter to the former. The testimony of the woman amounted to a probability; but this to a certainty. That excited their curiosity; but this gratified it. That put them upon the inquiry; but this possessed them of blessings more excellent than any they sought. That left them for a time in suspense—a suspense disagreeable indeed, yet useful and instructive; but this, whilst it relieved them of their anxious doubts, set their hearts entirely at ease. What shall I say? That was at most only capable of drawing off their attention for a while from the things of sense, and of laying a slender restraint upon their corrupt passions; but this fixed their hearts and desires to God, and determined them to pursuits truly noble and important. In one word, it produced in them the very opposite effects to those just mentioned of an historical and traditional faith. Instead of making them thoughtless and indolent, it made them inquisitive and diligent. Instead of puffing them up with pride and conceit, it rendered them humble and teachable. And instead of infusing into them a severe, uncharitable and persecuting spirit, it inspired them with the softer sentiments of forbearance, humanity, and love.

a Ver. 29.

Thus have we seen then, in the example of these Samaritans, what is the proper use of *authority* and *experience* in matters of religion. But of such infinite importance is this argument to each of us, that it will be necessary to insist more largely upon it. We will now therefore, detaching ourselves from the text, enter particularly into an examination of these two principles, on one or other of which all religion, whether notional or real, is built. We begin then,

First, With *authority*; by which is meant the opinion or testimony of uninspired and fallible men. Every one hath his connections with persons to whom he is naturally disposed to pay a deference, especially in matters of religion, either on account of his relation to them, or his friendship for them, or his prejudices in favour of their superior knowledge and piety. Now the being influenced or governed in our faith and profession by the judgment and decision of any such persons, is what we here intend by believing or acting upon *authority*. We will suppose then that a parent, a friend, a minister, or any wise and good man, affirms to us such important points as these: that the soul is immortal; that we are all in a guilty and depraved state; that Jesus the Son of God is the only Saviour of sinners; that his obedience and death are the considerations on which God and men are reconciled; that in order to the enjoyment of heaven our natures must be renewed by the influence of the blessed Spirit; and that repentance and faith are necessary to salvation. We will suppose, I say, these or any other points in religion affirmed to us by such persons as undeniable truths. The question is, what influence should their judgment have upon our minds? It will be readily answered in general, that as it should not on the one hand be considered as the rule or ground of our faith, so neither on the other should it be rejected as wholly vain and useless. Extremes either way are dangerous. It may not therefore be improper here to point out,

I. The important uses to which this kind of *authority* may and ought to be applied; and,

II. The infinite mischiefs which result from the abuse of it, that is, from an implicit faith, or a profession of

religion which owes its existence to any such undue influence.

I. As to the proper use of human *authority*.

1. One important purpose to which it may and ought to be applied, is to preclude an absolute disbelief or contempt of those things wherein we are instructed, till such time as we are capable of inquiring into them, or are possessed of any real *experience* of their influence on our hearts. Pride is one of the prevailing passions of human nature: whence it happens that many persons, because they would not be thought to take up their opinions on trust, make as it were a point of it, to fly in the faces of those whom they ought most to esteem and reverence. They will think, I should rather say talk, differently from their parents; lest they should endure the ignominious reflection of believing as they believe. They will declare themselves of a contrary judgment to this or the other wise and good man; that they may not seem to be overawed by his *authority*. And they will quarrel with all about them; in order to get the reputation of thinking freely. Whereas it may be, they have at the same time no fixed sentiments at all, and are void both of judgment and inclination to determine properly on any point whatever. Now such a conduct is equally absurd and sinful. It is an affront to common decency and common sense. Is religion less likely to be true, because it is the profession of my parents, or of this or that worthy person with whom I happen to be connected? Or may I reasonably hope to raise my character in the opinion of sensible men, by insulting those whom all are agreed I ought to reverence? No certainly: it is rather the direct way to expose me to their contempt. On the other hand it is an argument of good understanding, and I am sure it is a dictate of nature, to lean to the judgment of those whom Providence has made the guide of our youth, until such time however as we can give a reason for thinking and acting otherwise. If Abraham was worthy of commendation, for *commanding his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord* [a]; his children and household were also worthy of commendation, for paying a due

[a] Gen. xviii. 19.

deference to his *authority*. *Authority* then *is* a sufficient consideration to withhold persons from an absolute denial and an insolent abuse of the religion they are taught, until their judgments and consciences are arrived to a maturity, which may lawfully give them a superiority to such restraints. And indeed be the man who he may, that proposes any matter to our consideration which has the appearance of importance on it, he may reasonably demand so much respect from us, as to suspend all censure and contempt, until we have inquired into it. The woman of Samaria, as we have seen, was not insulted by her neighbours for the extraordinary report she brought them; nor did they at once reject it, even though it clashed with their national prejudices, and they knew not how at first to give credit to it.

2. Another use of *authority* in religion is to awaken our serious concern about it, and to put us upon a diligent examination of it. When such matters as were just now mentioned are affirmed to us; the very face of importance that is upon them, the possibility of their being true, the probability of it arising from the judgment and practice of those we esteem, and the very manner in which we are addressed, are all of them just and powerful motives to set us a thinking, and to put us upon reading and prayer. The Samaritans felt the force of this reasoning; and why not we? Is there nothing serious and solemn in the supposition that the soul is immortal, that it is ruined by sin, that Christ alone can restore it to the favour of God, and his Spirit alone form it for a better world; that there is a future judgment, a heaven and a hell, and that without holiness no man shall see the Lord? It is not impossible but these things may be true. Their being firmly believed and publicly professed by many wise and good men, and their having a correspondent influence on their hearts and lives, are all circumstances which render them at least in some degree probable. The earnestness likewise and affection with which they are urged upon us, are an argument both of the sincerity and good-will of those who wish us to believe. Now though none of these considerations are to determine our faith; yet right reason, our own interest, and the

common obligations of humanity, affection and gratitude, teach us that they are full of argument to persuade us to attention and reflection. And as the circumstances attending the testimony of others increase in their variety, weight, and importance; so do our obligations to consideration increase likewise. If he be a parent, a wise man, and a good man, and a dying man, who presses these truths upon us; if many such persons are agreed in doing so; if they do it in the most serious and affectionate manner; and if they repeat their admonitions again and again; surely such *authorities* ought not to be rejected because they are *authorities:* there is at least some reason in them, and it is but fit they should have their weight with us. To which it must be added, that though they infer nothing with certainty as to the doctrine itself; yet if we believe a Providence, it seems natural to conclude that by these means Providence is calling upon us to consider. And it is a fact, that God is often pleased to make use of this kind of influence to awaken the consciences of men, and so to open the way for the communication of spiritual and heavenly blessings. Nor is such a conduct at all unworthy of the divine wisdom, or inconsistent with those measures of government he commonly pursues. Once more,

3. Authority is of considerable use, when we have ourselves made trial of religion, to confirm our faith in it. That it is of itself an insufficient and unwarrantable ground of faith is readily admitted; nay it is not to be disputed, that a high opinion of the wisdom and piety of those with whom we are intimately connected, has too often an undue influence on our inquiries after the truth. But still, to him who has entered into the spirit of religion, and felt the mighty power of it upon his heart, it is a very strong collateral evidence of the divinity of it. And such an one will find himself at liberty to dwell frequently on this kind of testimony, and to derive the most agreeable satisfaction to himself from a contemplation of it, without suffering the least injury thereby. If upon serious examination, and from what hath passed in my own heart, it has clearly appeared to me, that the Lord Jesus Christ is the appointed Saviour of sinners, and so I have been induced to commit my immortal interests into his hands, and to form my

expectations of eternal life and happiness through his mediation and grace; it surely cannot but afford me a sensible pleasure to find this and the other wise and good man think and act as I have done. It must add firmness to my faith, and joy to my heart, to stand by the dying bed of a Christian friend, and to hear him, in that trying hour, express his lively hope of a blessed immortality upon the generous and animating constitution of the everlasting gospel. There is something in this kind of evidence peculiarly cheerful and pleasing, and which can hardly fail, and that upon the soundest principles of reason, to insinuate itself into the mind and conscience of a good man with the happiest success. Nor is there the least danger of its misleading the judgment, or giving an improper bias to the mind of him, who has upon sufficient evidence believed already.

Such then are the uses to which human testimony reasonably may, and most certainly ought to be applied. Let us now on the other hand,

II. Consider the evils that arise out of an implicit faith, or the resting our opinion and profession absolutely and entirely upon the sentence and decision of other men.

That the generality of mankind are prone to such a temper and conduct, no one who has made any observation on the world can at all question. What vast numbers are there, who can give no reason why they are of this or that religion, except that it was derived to them from their ancestors; or to say the best of it, that it is what wise and good men have assured them is true! Though they have neither been at the pains to think seriously about it themselves, nor hath it had any salutary influence upon their hearts and lives; yet they are abundantly confident of the divinity of it, and know not how to admit a doubt to the contrary. And here it were an easy matter to point out the immediate causes of this fatal credulity, such as ignorance, sloth, and a slight apprehension of the importance of divine things; all which are the deplorable effects of the apostacy of human nature. But it is rather our present business to represent the great evil and danger of it. And,

1. It must be acknowledged, that a faith thus wholly taught by the precept of men is most absurd, unsafe, and groundless. It is possible indeed that what the unhappy man receives and

professes may be true: but he is possessed of no rational principle or consideration to assure him it is so. He enters not into the thing itself; only infers the truth of it from the reverence, he hath some how or other contracted, for those who affirm it. But is this a foundation sufficient to support so important a superstructure, as religion is confessed to be by every considerate person? Can I persuade myself to think, that because this or that man is intitled to my esteem on account of his wisdom and probity, therefore I am obliged to yield to his decisions, in points of such moment as affect my everlasting interests? If this be a just way of reasoning, then two principles which are directly opposite to each other, must both of them be true. For with the same reason that one man takes up his religion on such *authority*, another of a contrary religion may likewise. Whereas it is most evident, that nothing can make the wisdom and learning of him to whom I thus submit my conscience, a sufficient ground of my faith, unless I am satisfied he is infallible. Nor can his goodness be a warrantable motive with me to follow him in his profession; unless I can be morally sure that he is what I take him to be, and that his goodness is the fruit of his principles. So that you see such a faith stands upon the most precarious and uncertain foundation: and however the object of it may happen to exist, yet the mind cannot be so satisfactorily assured of it, as to give it the force of a principle or spring of action. Which leads me to observe,

2. That a religion which owes its origin to *authority*, must needs be ineffectual to any truly good and valuable purposes. It can never be acceptable to God: for it arises not out of any reverence for him, but out of a servile dread, or at best an undue affection for a fellow-creature; and of consequence the main end it proposes, is to flatter the pride of men, and thereby to gain their favour and esteem. So that, like rivers which empty themselves again into the sea whence they came, it returns back in every expression of it to this corrupt fountain, and is wholly absorbed and lost there. Surely then that which neither comes from God, nor hath any just regard to him, can have no ground to expect his approbation. Nay it is as useless to ourselves, as it is unacceptable to God. That can never make men wise,

which exists in profession only, and not in the understanding: nor can a superstructure, which hath no foundation in conviction and evidence, be ever supposed to rise by the aid of true wisdom, or thence receive any accession of strength or ornament to it. The heart is likewise very little benefited by it; for the powers of such a faith are too feeble to master the inordinate desires and affections of the soul, and absolutely insufficient to afford any real pleasure and satisfaction to it. And the least reflection must convince every considerate man, that he who assumes the character of a Christian upon these principles, is not likely to maintain it any longer than custom, prejudice, and interest are favourable to his profession. With truth therefore may such persons say to their boasted religion, as the Jews once profanely said to God, 'It is vain to serve thee, and what profit is it to keep thy ways *a*?' But the most important consideration of all is,

3. That this kind of faith is exceeding hurtful and dangerous. If indeed neutrality or indifference in matters of religion were the only ill effect of it, it were more to be lamented than dreaded. But it is far otherwise. Sad experience has in many instances proved it to be a principle as operative as the faith of the real Christian; with this material difference, that while the fruits of the one are grateful and salutary, those of the other are most hurtful and poisonous. Nay it is oftentimes of wild and luxuriant growth; like noxious plants which usually spread faster and wider, than those which are innocent and useful. Ignorance, obstinacy, pride, and malevolence are the genuine and hasty product of it: and that not only when the things received and professed are essentially false and erroneous, but even when they are most true and scriptural.

Here I might shew you this wretched credulity, in all its sad and dangerous process on the heart. Springing originally from ignorance, you easily see how it tends to increase and promote it, by precluding all occasion for a diligent inquiry into the word of God, and a severe examination of the heart. For he who holds his religious principles, not upon the sense and feeling of his own breast, but purely upon the *authority*

a Mal. iii. 14.

of others, considers himself as excused, by their wisdom, learning and integrity, of all the painful anxiety of consideration. It is not his business to think and judge; but barely to pronounce. Thus every avenue to conviction is close shut and guarded; and the consequence is the most confirmed obstinacy and self-conceit. And how easy the transition is from hence to pride and insolence, the least reflection will shew. For being fully satisfied that he is right, he begins insensibly to frame the like venerable idea of himself, as of those from whom he has derived his faith. This puffs up his foolish heart with intolerable vanity: whence of necessity proceeds impatience of contradiction; which violently impels him to the gratification of the still more fierce and diabolical passions of cruelty and revenge. And thus a religion, taken up purely upon the testimony of others, and out of an undue regard to their *authority*, almost necessarily makes men worse than they are by nature. It enables them securely to indulge the lusts of their hearts, under the specious pretence of exalted piety; and so does infinite dishonour to the cause of real truth, and in the end brings the heaviest weight of vengeance on their own guilty heads.

The proper use of *authority*, and the mischiefs resulting from an abuse of it, having been thus briefly considered, we come now,

SECONDLY, To an examination of the other, and indeed the only sufficient test of religion: and that is *experience*.

By *experience* is meant the bringing a thing to the trial, in order to ascertain the true nature and true value of it. So the goldsmith tries his metals; to know their quality, whether they have any alloy or base mixture in them; and to know their weight, whether they rise to the right and current standard. To this the words of the apostle allude, where he speaks of *the trial of our faith being much more precious than of gold which perisheth a*. *Experience* therefore, when applied to the common affairs of life, signifies a clear, full and sensible demonstration of what we had before only a general, abstracted and confused idea. In like manner when applied to religion,

a 1 Pet. i. 7. δοκίμιον, exploratio.

it intends the being rightly instructed in the knowledge of divine things, and the feeling their natural and genuine influence on our hearts and lives. In the former view of it, it respects more immediately the judgment: and so it stands directly opposed to the taking things upon trust, or merely on the credit of those around us. The Samaritans believed not for the saying of the woman; but went themselves and heard Jesus, and so became satisfied that he was the Christ. And without doubt it is the indispensable duty of every one, who would be honest and happy in his profession, to do as these primitive Christians did, and to make diligent inquiry into the things of God. *Search the Scriptures*, says our Saviour to the Jews *a*: and it is mentioned to the honour of the Bereans, that as they received the word with all readiness of mind, so *they searched the Scriptures daily, whether the things which the apostles preached were as they reported b.* And the measures by which the word of God directs us to pursue our inquiries, are founded in the truest reason; while they check that pride and forwardness, which are too apt to challenge a kind of evidence, which the nature of some truths will not admit of. But we are here considering *experience*, not so much in reference to the understanding and judgment, as to the temper of the heart and the conduct of the life. It will be necessary therefore,

I. To inquire how it operates in this view of it, so as to furnish a rational and satisfactory proof, in concurrence with Scripture, of the main truths of religion;

II. To shew wherein the faith which arises out of this sort of evidence, differs from that which is built alone on human *authority*; and,

III. To point out the several ways, in which this evidence may be abused or perverted.

I. Let us inquire how *experience* operates, when considered as a practical principle, so as to furnish a satisfactory and convincing proof of the great truths of religion.

Now there are many points, I am sensible, which are not in their own nature capable of being reduced to this test, and

a John v. 39. *b* Acts xvii. 11.

so of furnishing in this way an adequate proof of their divinity. As for instance, the resurrection of the body, though a doctrine clearly revealed in the word of God, yet has not such an immediate connection with the inward sense and feeling of the heart, otherwise than that the contemplation of it yields pleasure, as to be capable of being proved thereby. And this is perhaps the case, with respect to what may be called the circumstantial parts of some other doctrines. But be that as it may, it is certain that many of the great principles of religion, whence others are very naturally to be inferred, do so enter into the genius and spirit of a Christian, and so interweave themselves with his most intimate *experience*, as to demonstrate to himself their truth. Not to speak here of the principles of mere natural religion, of which every man hath sufficient testimony in his own conscience; we will just instance two particulars of revealed religion, in the firm belief of which the life of godliness consists. And they are on the one hand, the guilt in which sin hath involved our natures; and our restoration to the favour of God by the mediation of Christ: and on the other, the depravity of the human heart; and its renovation by the influence of the Holy Spirit.

1. As to the guilty state to which he is reduced by sin, and his recovery by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christian can infer these truths, and that with the greatest reason, from what hath passed in his own heart. Men do in general acknowledge themselves sinners; though alas it is too evident, that they have only superficial notions of the evil nature and just demerit of sin! But the good man confesses himself a sinner, not merely upon the general principles that others do, no nor only upon the testimony of his Bible; but from a conviction of this matter, impressed in a lively and awakening manner upon his heart. Of his lost and miserable condition he has been made truly sensible. Sin he has beheld in its just colours, by the light of the pure and perfect law of God, and through the mirror of the sufferings of Christ his Son. Real grief and compunction of heart he has endured on account of it: nay he has been deeply affected, as well with the disingenuity and baseness of sin, as with an apprehension of

the misery and danger to which it has exposed him. Now such *experience* serves as a demonstration to his own mind, of the truth of what Scripture so fully declares; 'that the whole world is become guilty before God; that there is the deepest turpitude in sin; that the contagion hath spread itself through all our nature; that it necessarily exposes us to the displeasure of a holy God; and that no man can himself expiate the guilt of it *a*.' And how much does this kind of evidence differ from that of one, who takes up his notion of himself as a sinner, from a superficial observation of his own conduct, and from the general opinion which prevails, that all mankind have some way offended God!

So again, as to his restoration to the favour of God by the obedience and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The knowledge of this most interesting truth, does not indeed arise out of any principle in nature, or any notices which reason could give. It is a scheme entirely of divine contrivance, and to Scripture we are wholly indebted for the discovery of it. But this provision of the grace of God being seasonably applied to the desponding and depraved heart, and so becoming on the one hand, an effectual source of divine consolation, and on the other, a powerful motive to cheerful obedience; there naturally arises out of such *experience*, thus exactly falling in with the Scripture account of it, a kind of attestation to the truth of this grand doctrine of revealed religion, that puts it with the good man himself beyond all doubt. It is now no longer with him a matter of mere speculation or general report, that *the blood of Jesus Christ the Son of God cleanses from all sin b*: he knows it, he is sensible of it, and he gives God the glory of it. With the Samaritans he says, feeling somewhat of the joy and gratitude that inspired them, *NOW I believe, not because of the saying of this or the other person; I have heard myself, and know that this is the Christ, and that he is able to save them unto the uttermost that come unto God by him c.* And you easily see how very different the faith which results from this *experience* must be, from that of

a Psal. cxxx. 3.—Rom. iii. 9—23. v. 12—ult. vii. 13.—Jer. ii. 19.
b 1 John i. 7. *c* Heb. vii. 25.

him who has no other reason to give why he believes Christ to be the Saviour of sinners, than that it is the opinion and profession of his friends and acquaintance. The difficulties this latter person hath to struggle with, when his faith comes to be attacked by artful and designing men, are easily, and it may be added rationally, surmounted by the former. But we will go on, and apply the same reasoning to the

2. Second point just now mentioned, the depravity of the human heart, and its renovation by the influence of the Holy Spirit. So numerous, and so striking are the proofs of the general corruption of mankind, that one would wonder any person should dispute the fact. Some however there are who set down the most, if not all the serious Christian laments, to the account of human frailty, or a kind of natural imperfection, which is in no wise to be accounted criminal, and which necessarily attends that rank of beings we are placed in. And others there are who, while they feebly acknowledge this universal defection from God, are but little if at all affected with it. Now the man who is thoroughly acquainted with himself, receives this sad truth not merely upon the opinion of others, or even upon the testimony of Scripture itself, but upon the loud and faithful report of his own conscience. His religion hath led him into the secret chambers of his heart, and fixed his attention to an infinite variety of transactions there, which formerly passed wholly unnoticed by him. And while he has justly stood amazed, not only at the apostacy of his will in general, but at the innumerable evil passions which he hath found obtruding themselves upon almost all his thoughts; how naturally and with what unaffected humility has he fallen into the language of the patriarch Job, *Lord, I am vile, what shall I answer thee a? experience* here is the counterpart of Scripture. And as he cannot doubt of what he hath so sensibly felt, and which has been the occasion of such deep humiliation before God; so he cannot avoid yielding an entire assent to what Scripture conformably to this his *experience* has so amply declared; 'that whereas man was made upright, he is become otherwise by his own inventions; that sin dwelleth in him, yea

a Job xl. 4.

that in his flesh there is no good thing; and that thus all men have corrupted their way, and there is none good, no not one *a*.' Nor can we fail of being struck at first view with the difference, between an assent given upon such evidence, and the feeble acknowledgment of one who is an utter stranger to himself.

In like manner, the Scripture doctrine of the influence and grace of the blessed Spirit challenges the faith of a Christian, in much the same way. A doctrine indeed it is, the discovery of which must have come from heaven, whence the blessing itself is immediately derived: for nothing is there in nature that could assure us of so extraordinary a benefit at the hand of God. But admitting the happy fruits of a divine operation on the heart to have been in any degree felt and enjoyed, it is easy to imagine how this point, which before was only matter of speculation, should to such a person become an article of firm belief. To argue, I acknowledge, from the effects to a supposed cause, where the manner of its operation, like that of the wind, is not capable of a clear and adequate description, may be thought at first view not so perfectly conclusive. But if the Christian has felt such dispositions and affections excited in his breast towards God, as are of a most pure and cheerful tendency, and which at the same time a firm persuasion of the degeneracy of his own heart forbids him to ascribe to himself; surely he is justified, upon the soundest principles of reason, in tracing these streams up to that divine origin whither his Bible leads him: nor is it to be wondered that he is fully satisfied of what he is there so largely assured, 'that religion is the wisdom from above; that that which is spiritual is born of the Spirit; and that those whom God hath formed for himself are the temples in which the Holy Ghost condescends to dwell *b*.' The prevalence therefore of vital godliness, though it will not enable a man to discuss all the questions, which may have arisen upon this sublime and glorious doctrine; will nevertheless fix an infinitely livelier impression of the truth of it upon the heart, than the most clear and positive decisions of the wisest and best of men.

a Eccl. vii. 29.—Rom. vii. 17, 18. iii. 10—12.
b James iii. 17.—John iii. 6.—1 Cor. vi. 19.

Having thus illustrated what we mean by *experience*, and shewn how it operates in becoming a test of divine truths, we must now,

II. Consider, a little more particularly, wherein the faith that arises out of this sort of evidence, differs from that which is built alone on *authority*; whence will be clearly seen both the utility and importance of it. And

1. As that was found to be most absurd, unsafe, and groundless; so this will appear upon reflection to be most rational, scriptural, and satisfactory. The faith, if it deserve that name, which owes its origin merely to the opinion and judgment of others, is as we have seen, weak and inconclusive; since it is not evidence, properly speaking, which in that case determines the man, but passion and prejudice. For he does not believe because, from the nature of the thing, or from the divine testimony concerning it, it appears clearly to him to be so; but because another person, of whom he happens to have a good opinion, roundly asserts it. So that his belief is suspended entirely upon the credit of this other person: a kind of evidence this, which is by no means adapted to the nature of what is believed. Facts indeed may, and oftentimes can only, be proved by testimony. But surely the great things of religion do many of them require a different kind of proof. It is not a wise or good man's telling me that salvation is to be obtained alone through the mediation of Christ, that is a sufficient ground for my believing it. The doctrine is to be tried by other measures, before it can be firmly and properly assented to. And I ask any reasonable person, what measures of trial can be devised more just and natural, than those of which we have been discoursing? If a truth approves itself to my understanding and judgment, and at the same time so touches the inmost springs of my heart, as to become a source of solid consolation, and a motive to cheerful obedience; do I not upon the most rational grounds receive and embrace it? Nor is this faith less scriptural than it is reasonable. For as the apostles in their discourses to Christians themselves, do every where appeal for the truth of the doctrine they taught, to the effects it had produced on their hearts and lives; so one of

them expressly declares, that *he who believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself a*, that is, he hath such a witness arising out of the influence of the Christian doctrine on his heart, as abundantly warrants and confirms his faith. This sort of evidence must also be perfectly satisfactory to a man's own mind; since it is the result of arguments the most plain and simple, and which require not a long train of deductions, to set it in a clear and convincing light. Perplexed reasoning, though just, often leaves the mind in doubt: but the force of this reasoning appears at first view, and is level to the meanest capacities. *The wayfaring man though a fool cannot err here b.* And as the simplicity of this kind of evidence adds weight to it, and increases its reasonableness; so it shews that the most plain and illiterate Christian does not take things upon trust, but has a sufficient reason or ground for the hope that is in him. Again,

2. A faith warranted by such evidence as this will be effectual to the best and most important purposes. That which is taught by the precept of men can never be acceptable to God: for as it is wholly destitute of any regard to him, so it is likewise absolutely repugnant to his word, which in the strongest terms forbids our *calling any man master on earth c.* But that firm assent of the mind to the truth of religion which is the result of an experimental acquaintance with it, is highly pleasing to God; as it owes its origin to the influence and grace of his Spirit, and tends to unite the affections to him. He who thus believes, *believes with all the heart d;* a phrase which very happily expresses the intimate connection there is between faith and *experience.* And of what use it is to the Christian himself, in respect of the great ends of religion, appears upon the very face of the argument. For it would be little better than a contradiction in terms, to suppose a man to be confirmed in his belief of the gospel of Christ from the pure and spiritual tendency of it, while his faith, assisted by this evidence, has a quite different effect. If therefore it be genuine, it cannot fail of persuading him *to deny ungodliness*

a 1 John v. 10. *b* Isa. xxxv. 8.
c Matt. xxiii. 9, 10. *d* Acts viii. 37.—Rom. x. 10.

and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world a. In like manner also, the efficacy of it to promote the inward peace and comfort of the mind, might with the same force of argument be clearly shewn. While we look at the great realities of religion with the eyes of other men, if I may so express myself, the effect will be very inconsiderable in regard of the natural fears of the heart. But believing for ourselves, we shall be furnished with a cordial to refresh our spirits, amidst the many vicissitudes and troubles of human life to which we are ever liable.

Nor can we here overlook those important fruits of a real *experience* of religion, which stand directly opposed to the mischiefs that were mentioned under a former head, as resulting from *authority*. If implicit faith tends to make men thoughtless and indolent; the contrary must be the effect of believing upon evidence. Instead of shutting up every avenue to farther knowledge and conviction, it will burst the bands of ignorance and prejudice, and inspire the mind with a noble freedom and vigour in the pursuit of divine truth; so that, in the language of Scripture, it *will follow on to know the Lord b.* And as pride and confidence are ever inseparably connected with a servile and slothful subjection to human *authority*; so humility and self-diffidence will ever be the ornament of a truly Christian faith. Nor yet will this ornament be used as a veil to conceal a sinful neutrality to the distinguishing glories of divine revelation; for as *experience* is fruitful of all lowliness and sobriety of mind, so it begets likewise a steady attachment to those truths which give life and vigour to it. And little need be added to shew the happy influence of it, to subdue all that malevolence which arises out of mere speculations in religion, and which, in the habit of pious zeal, too often insinuates itself into the hearts of men, and undermines those very principles it would seem most concerned to maintain and defend. This *wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy c.* Once more,

a Tit. ii. 12. b Hos. vi. 3. c James iii. 17.

8. Another commendation of this faith, which after what hath been said, cannot fail to set its importance in the strongest light is, that it will endure. What is held only upon the slender tenure of passion, speculation, and, which is still more uncertain and precarious, a reverence for the opinion of others, a man is ever in danger of being deprived of: nay a zeal that has no other principles than these to support it, however fair and promising its appearance may for a while be, will by and by offer violence to itself, and bury the imaginary faith whence it sprung in its own ruins. But this is not likely to be the sad issue of a faith, which has laid hold upon the heart, has united the soul to God, and is become a principle of love and obedience. It is not every attack that is made upon it, either by the subtle arts of unfair reasoning on the one hand, or by the more terrifying threats of persecution on the other, that will succeed to its ruin. But, even though it were in some particular instances to be so shaken by the sudden blasts of temptation as to endanger its entire extirpation; yet the sincere Christian may assure himself, and that without being at liberty to draw thence any inference favourable to sloth and presumption, that it shall happily receive the support of a power superior to his own. For besides the many promises to this effect in the word of God, he hath sure ground there given him to believe, that the blessed Jesus, even in his exalted state, forgets not to use his interest with the Father in behalf of all his real disciples, that their *faith may not fail* a.

And now, the nature and use of *experience* in matters of religion having been considered, it is but reasonable,

III. That we should be cautioned against the abuse of it.

Abused indeed it cannot be, by him who is really possessed of it, to any purposes materially hurtful and dangerous. Yet it is certain that men may substitute the reveries of their own distempered imaginations in the room of real religion, and upon that foundation build notions absurd in themselves and of a fatal tendency. But as this abuse of *experience* does by no means disprove the reality of what we have been contending for; so neither is it thence to be inferred, that *experience*

a Luke xxii. 32.—Rom. viii. 34.

is a precarious and delusive test of true faith. For a little reflection will enable a good man to perceive a substantial difference, between the whims and transports of an enthusiastic mind, and the sober exercises of genuine and spiritual religion. Nor is any one in danger of being led aside by such a deception, who makes a due use of that reason which God has given him. For even supposing the violent sallies of natural passion were in themselves scarcely distinguishable from the operations of divine grace on the heart; yet their tendencies, and the actual fruits they produce in the course of a person's life, would clearly discover what they really are. And after all, nothing that passes in my own mind will authenticate a doctrine I may build upon such a foundation, if that doctrine be manifestly repugnant to the word of God. While therefore *experience* is necessary for the confirmation of my faith in the great principles of religion, that *experience* cannot mislead me, if it really make my heart and life better, and if the principles which are confirmed by it, are evidently consonant with the sacred Scriptures.

But there are other ways in which this criterion or test of faith is capable of being perverted; though with less real mischief than in the former instance. Such is the case, when it is applied to certain points in religion, of which it is in its own nature an insufficient measure. This must be obvious to every considerate mind. Some truths, though clearly laid down in the word of God, have not so intimate and immediate a connection with the feelings of the heart, as to be capable of being fully ascertained thereby. A man may, for instance, with good reason be confirmed in his faith of a future judgment, from a consciousness he feels in himself that he is an accountable creature; yet it would be great weakness in him thence to infer the several circumstances attending that solemn transaction, which are however particularly described in Scripture. The nature therefore of the doctrine is first to be considered, before we determine whether *experience* be capable of reflecting any light upon it. And then again, the use of this kind of evidence is greatly mistaken, when we expect it should have weight with other men to induce them to believe. Re-

ligion is a personal thing, an affair wherein none are concerned but God and ourselves. What therefore hath passed on the heart of one man can be no argument to convince another. To suppose it should, would be not only to reason very absurdly, but in effect to vacate the necessity of personal *experience*, and to establish human *authority* in the room of it, the great evil of which has, I hope, been satisfactorily shewn.

The sum of the whole then is this: *Authority* is of very rational and important use, to restrain the ignorant and thoughtless from an absolute denial and contemptuous treatment of religion; to awaken men to a serious concern about it; and, upon reflection, to confirm the real Christian in his belief of it. But it is abused, when we make it the reason or ground of our profession: for a faith wholly built upon such a principle is most absurd and unscriptural, ineffectual to any valuable purposes, and fruitful of the most mischievous and dangerous consequences. *Experience* on the other hand, that is, a personal and practical acquaintance with religion, which is clearly distinguishable from enthusiasm and passion, furnishes a man himself with a sufficient and satisfactory evidence of the truth of it. So that a faith tried by this measure, and supported with this kind of proof, is most rational and scriptural, is effectual to the best and noblest purposes, and will certainly endure.

And now what remains, but that we attempt some brief improvement of these things? Let me then,

1. Expostulate awhile with those who absolutely reject all *authority* in matters of religion, treating it even at the very first view with ridicule and contempt. Is this, let me ask you, Sirs, a conduct to be vindicated even upon the common principles of reason, prudence and humanity? Would you not have censured the Samaritans, had they thus behaved towards their neighbour, when with all appearance of sincerity and friendship, she came and told them what had happened to her without the city, intreating them to make serious inquiry into it? What excuse have you then to offer for acting so disingenuous a part yourselves? Will you say that there is little or no importance in the things reported to you? The reverse

of this appears upon the very face of the argument: and, however you may question their reality, yet considering the attention which has been paid to them, by some at least whose wisdom as well as probity is on all hands acknowledged, it can hardly be doubted that they are highly probable. What then if in the issue they should be found to be true? Will not your own consciences reproach you for your wilful contempt of them, amidst the many awakening calls given you to consideration? Will not those, who have charitably followed the example of this excellent woman, acquiesce in your condemnation? Yea, will not the Samaritans themselves be swift witnesses against you, in the great day of the Lord? But even admitting it a possible thing, that the Christian should in the end be mistaken; yet methinks reflection and consideration are a debt you can hardly in common decency refuse to pay to their friendship, who by the many tears they shed over you, and the many intreaties they pour upon you, appear to have your real interest at heart. Be persuaded therefore to give *them* a hearing, who tell you they have been with Christ, and learned of him the way of salvation: nor let it be said that the Saviour has by his gospel come into your very neighbourhood, and that you have treated those who brought you the news of it with ingratitude and abuse. But,

2. Whatever be the regard you pay to *authority*, yet if your religion has no other foundation than this, it will prove a vain and useless speculation. To have enjoyed the instructions of wise and good men, and of pious and affectionate parents, is your mercy; and you do well to allow such influence all that weight with you which it justly deserves; but if your faith is to be traced to no higher origin—to no purer source than this, what satisfactory assurance have you, that the principles you thus profess to believe are not false and groundless? Or, should they be true, yet will the feeble assent you yield to them make you either happier or better? Or admitting that this your assent, through your undue reverence for others, has acquired a degree of confidence; yet will it, think you, afford solid satisfaction to your minds, when on the verge of another world, that you have believed for the saying of this or that person;

while you remain conscious, that you have not yourselves heard Jesus, and so learned that he is the Christ? But it may be, you have been busily employed in speculations on matters of religion; whence you have collected what may be called a justness of sentiment or opinion. Still give me leave to ask you, Of what avail will your notions be, however just in themselves, if they have taken no hold on your hearts? Though the Samaritans had exhausted all their skill in curious inquiries, and had even proceeded so far, as to propagate with some appearance of zeal, the story the woman told them; yet if they had not themselves gone out of the city to see Christ, and had not brought forth the fruits of love and obedience in their lives, their faith would have been justly questionable by all around them. Rest not therefore in any thing short of a real *experience* of religion. This, and this only, will give life and vigour to your profession; inspire your hearts with a noble resolution, amidst the attacks of infidelity and temptation; render the path of duty, in some degree at least, easy and pleasant; and yield you substantial comfort in that tremendous hour, when all the feeble supports *authority* can afford, will sink under the ruins of dissolving nature. May the good Spirit of God possess you of this divine blessing; to whose almighty influence and grace we therefore humbly and fervently commend you! To conclude,

3. How great is your happiness, Christians, who have not only tasted of the distant streams of religion, as they have flowed down to you through the testimony and *experience* of others; but have also drank at the fountain of divine knowledge and consolation! You have believed, not for the saying of other men; but have yourselves heard Jesus, and known that he is the Christ the Saviour of the world. By the light of his instructions, accompanied with the influence of his Spirit, you have seen your misery and danger, and the sufficiency and suitableness of the remedy which almighty grace has provided. And whilst you have committed your immortal interests into the hands of Christ as your Saviour; from a sense of duty and gratitude, you have yielded yourselves to his government as your king. Give God the glory of all your

hopes. Rejoice in Christ, *by whom you have access by faith into the grace wherein you stand a. Having tasted that the Lord is gracious, desire earnestly the sincere milk of the word, that you may grow thereby b.* Use the means which God has appointed for confirming your faith, and enlarging your *experience;* at the same time imploring that influence from above, which can only render them effectual. Be cautious that you mingle not your own conceits with the sober exercises of real religion. And though you are sensible that no happy *experience* of which you may be possessed, can have sufficient force to convince others; let it nevertheless be your constant concern, by the purity of your lives, to oblige them *to take knowledge of you that you have been with Jesus c.* In one word; amidst all the painful exercises which may attend the discipline of the heart, in your way through this world, be comforted with the animating prospect of that bliss and glory, which shall be the certain and joyful issue of such *experience,* in the realms of light and perfection above.

a Rom. v. 2. *b* 1 Pet. ii. 3. *c* Acts iv. 13.

THE UTILITY OF LEARNING TO A CHRISTIAN MINISTER:

A

SERMON,

PREACHED AT BROADMEAD, BRISTOL,

AUGUST 27th, 1783,

BEING THE DAY OF THE ANNUAL MEETING

OF THE

EDUCATION SOCIETY.

THE UTILITY OF LEARNING TO A CHRISTIAN MINISTER.

Acts xxvi. 24, 25.—*And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself, much learning doth make thee mad. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.*

A sound judgment and a warm heart are eminent qualifications of a Christian minister. They are the gifts of God, and ought to be devoutly acknowledged as such. And one way of expressing our gratitude for them, is by seeking to excel therein, as the apostle exhorts the Corinthians, for the edifying of the church. What therefore is of use to improve these gifts which God has bestowed, or in other words, to enable a minister to reason with clearness, and to persuade with energy, ought to be treated with respect, and cultivated with attention. Now true learning is that thing. To explain and improve this point is the object of the present discourse.

The apostle Paul, having been delivered by the Jews into the hands of the Romans, after several examinations, was brought by Festus before Agrippa. This Agrippa was the son of Herod Agrippa, who put James to death and committed Peter to prison; and the great grandson of Herod the Great. He had considerable territories in the neighbourhood of Cesarea, the seat of the Roman governor; and happening to be there at this time on a visit to Festus, was desirous of hearing Paul himself. Accordingly, at the commandment of Festus he was brought forth, and permitted to make his defence to king Agrippa. This he does with great force of reason and elocution. He first of all congratulates himself on the idea, that the prince before whom he pleaded his cause, having been bred up among the Jews, was expert in all their

customs and questions, to some of which he should have occasion to refer; and as it would be necessary for him to be particular, he beseeches him to hear him patiently. He affirms that his manner of life from the beginning, had been conformable to the rules of the strictest sect among the Jews, the Pharisees, as was well known to them all, if they had candour enough to bear witness. As to the matter upon which he stood in judgment, it was not for any crime he had committed, but for his zealous attachment to the promise of a resurrection to eternal life through the Messiah; a promise to which the twelve tribes who constantly served God day and night, hoped to attain. And now, says he, for this hope's sake, O king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. But, why should it be thought incredible, that God should raise the dead? He is able to do it, and was he to do it the honours of his moral government would be thereby displayed and vindicated. Admitting it therefore probable, it will not be thought strange if I lay before this assembly the positive evidence I have to adduce in favour of it.—So he goes on to state, the better to secure their regard to the credibility of his testimony, the aversion he formerly felt to the Christian doctrine which he now avowed. So inimical had he been to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, that he had persecuted the professors of it in the most rigorous and cruel manner. But, as he was going down, in all his mad zeal, from Jerusalem to Damascus, with authority from the chief priest to seize the Christians there and hale them to prison, at mid-day, a great light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shone round about him and his company. And when they were all fallen to the earth, he heard a voice saying in the Hebrew tongue, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks;' to which replying in amazement, 'Who art thou, Lord?' he received for answer, 'I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee: delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto

whom now I send thee, to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.' Upon this, he immediately in obedience to the heavenly vision betook himself to the faithful and zealous discharge of those duties to which his Master had appointed him. And for these causes, he proceeds, the Jews caught him in the temple, and went about to kill him. However 'having obtained help of God,' says he, 'I continue to this day, witnessing to all those things and none other which the prophets and Moses did say should come: that Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.'

Such was the apostle's defence, than which nothing could be more plain and artless, and at the same time more eloquent and masterly. And we may be sure there was a pathos and energy in his manner suited to the dignity and importance of his subject.

Now *as he thus spake for himself*, our text tells us, *Festus* the Roman governor *said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself.* From this strange story thou hast told us, and from thy eager vehement manner of relating it, I conclude thou art distracted. For who but a madman would assert that he had seen and conversed with one that is dead; and more than this, that a devoted Jew was sent of God to enlighten not only his own nation, but the more polite and well instructed Greeks and Romans? *Much learning*, much study of letters, and particularly of the ancient records of thy country, *has driven thee mad.* To which the apostle, unprovoked and in full possession of himself, replies, *I am not mad, most noble Festus, but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.* It is true the things I have related are extraordinary, and my manner has been vehement. But it does not thence follow that I am mad. What I have asserted is not impossible; the evidence of the facts reported is before you, and will bear the strictest scrutiny. And I appeal to this whole audience whether I have not discoursed and reasoned of these matters with

all plainness and sobriety. If I am possessed of learning both human and divine, if I have made the Scripture my study, and spent much time and pains in acquiring knowledge, this my learning hath not deprived me of my senses, but secured me from the wild flights of enthusiasm, and enabled me the better to investigate the truth. Nor should my earnestness be interpreted into an argument of insanity, since the importance of the subject demands the exertion of all my powers.

Now here we might enter into the proof of the grand points which the apostle affirms in this discourse, and which he styles *words of truth and soberness*. Is Jesus of Nazareth the person he said he was, or an impostor? Did he, or did he not rise from the dead? Is his gospel to be credited or rejected? The answer is, if the story the apostle here relates of himself is true, then the Christian religion is of God. But what the apostle relates of himself is true. For if it were not, he must either himself have been deceived, or have designed to deceive others, each of which is absolutely incredible. Let any one calmly consider what he said upon this occasion, and others of the like nature, and attentively examine his several epistles; and he will, I am persuaded, justify him from the charge of enthusiasm. He was a cool, sound, sober reasoner. And let any one on the other hand consider what had been the apostle's manner of life previous to his conversion, his prejudices against the Christians, the sufferings to which he exposed himself by embracing the gospel, and his steady perseverance notwithstanding all to the end; let any one I say impartially consider these things, and he will as readily acquit him of the charge of imposture. To which it must be further added, that the circumstances of his conviction, as he relates them, were such as made it not only possible but easy to detect the fraud, had the whole business been a cheat.—But these are matters, which, however important, and however our text would naturally lead us to the consideration of them, we do not mean now to insist upon.

The point I have in view is to shew the utility of the apostle's learning both human and divine, to qualify him for those extraordinary duties to which he was called. The mission

upon which he was sent to Jews and Gentiles was very arduous and important. He was to reason with men upon the great facts reported in the gospel, and upon the great doctrines founded thereon. And he was to urge the belief of the truths and the practice of the duties of Christianity with a warmth and energy suited to their importance. Now if the apostle's learning made him a sober reasoner and an earnest and affectionate preacher, surely it was a good thing. Let us for a moment consider this question respecting him: so our way will be opened to the main object of this discourse.

As to divine knowledge it will be admitted on all hands that the apostle possessed it in a very high degree. He was no small proficient in that learning which makes a man wise unto salvation. He was well instructed in the knowledge of his own heart, and the true and only grounds of acceptance with God. And whoever is conversant with his history must know what a happy effect this his learning had upon his temper and conduct; how humble, meek, patient, benevolent and zealous he was, ever exerting himself for the glory of God and the good of men.

But as the apostle, in the character of a minister, stood in need of a more accurate and comprehensive acquaintance with the Christian scheme than others, so God was pleased to inspire him in an extraordinary manner with this knowledge. The Holy Spirit was his instructor, and by his immediate teaching he was led into all truth. He clearly saw the connection between the law of nature and the gospel of Christ, the Jewish and the Christian dispensations, the histories of the world and the church, and the predictions of the ancient prophets and their fulfilment. And every gift necessary for communicating this knowledge to others with clearness, fervour and success, was conferred upon him.

But then we are not to conceive of the apostle as having no other learning than what he thus received immediately from God by inspiration. He had a great deal of human or acquired knowledge. The Roman governor you see in our text speaks of him as a man of letters, a scholar, and not a superficial scholar neither. Such it is agreed on all hands he was,

nor does he himself deny it. He was distinguished from most others by very strong mental powers, a lively imagination, a sound judgment, and a warm heart. And by diligent application, both before and after his conversion, he laid up a considerable stock of knowledge. He was bred at the feet of Gamaliel, a man held in such high esteem for his learning that it was said of him when he died, that the honour of the law died with him. No doubt therefore the apostle was like Agrippa, and in a greater degree than he, *expert in all customs and questions among the Jews.* The very phrase here used to express his great learning, πολλα γραμματα, conveys an idea of his having been deeply conversant with the ancient records of his country, both divine and human. He had read them in their original languages, read them over and over again, and studied them with great attention and correctness. And it clearly appears from the excellent discourse he delivered at Athens, and many passages in his history and epistles, that he was well versed in the Pagan philosophy, knew how to detect the false reasoning of the schools, and was acquainted with the writings of their poets, such as Aratus, Cleanthes, and others. Indeed it is highly probable he was a stranger to few, if any of the arts and sciences so celebrated in those times.

Now the utility of all this learning to enable him to reason soberly, and persuade with energy, methinks I need not take pains to shew. His knowledge, however he came by it, whether by inspiration or study; and whensoever, whether before or after his conversion, availed him not a little. Now we see him reasoning with Pagans and then with Jews: now arguing from the law of nature, and then from the Old Testament scriptures: now appealing to the writings of heathen poets and philosophers, and then referring to the traditions of the fathers, of which he had been exceedingly zealous. Now stating his arguments with all logical exactness, and then exposing the sophistry and false learning of his adversaries. Nor did his knowledge, both human and divine, fail of instructing him deeply in the truth and importance of the subjects on which he discoursed. Whence find him, as occasion requires, addressing the hearts and consciences of

men with glowing ardour and affection; rising nobly superior to the vain, affected, popular arts of rhetoric on the one hand, and, on the other, to all the puerilities of trifling allegory, and all the meanness of indecent and vulgar expression. In the most nervous and yet simple manner he reasons, and with a pathos exceeding that of a Demosthenes or a Cicero, he persuades. Would we, could we wish him to have been possessed of one jot of learning less than he had—a kind of learning, in all the views we have taken of it, so admirably adapted to promote the essential interest of mankind, to confound the accusers of the truth, and to put to silence the powers of darkness?

Thus have we considered the question of learning in its respect to the apostle, and from thence are led to consider its utility in regard of ordinary ministers. Here we shall speak of learning in three points of view, or rather of three different kinds of learning—that which is necessary to make a man a Christian—that which is necessary to make him a minister—and that further learning which, though not necessary, is yet highly ornamental and useful to a preacher of the gospel.

I. As to the learning that is necessary to make a man a Christian.

Repentance from dead works, and faith towards God, the apostle represents as first principles of the doctrine of Christ. In these the foundation of real religion is laid. He therefore who would be a Christian man must be born again, as our Saviour insists in his discourse with Nicodemus. A moral change must pass on his heart. From a bad man he must become a good man, from a lover of the world a lover of God, and from a miserable vassal of Satan a willing servant and disciple of Christ. It is not necessary that he should be an adept in all questions of divinity, that he should have a comprehensive, accurate view of the Christian scheme. But it is necessary that he should discern the difference between good and evil, that he should be made acquainted with his own heart, that he should be sensible of the value of his immortal soul, that he should perceive the dangers to which his guilt has exposed him, that he should look for the mercy of God

alone through Jesus Christ, and that he should be willing to submit himself to the discipline and instruction of the divine Saviour.

Now I am sensible that the old distinction is a very just one, that it is grace that makes a man a Christian, and gifts a minister. Yet, sure I am, *he* will make a very indifferent minister, be his gifts what they may, who is wholly destitute of the grace of God. It is true a graceless man who possesses knowledge, judgment and eloquence may be capable of instructing others, and his exertions though not directed to the right object, may by an over-ruling influence attain it. He may clearly state many truths, and in a masterly manner defend them. But it is not conceivable how one who has not entered into the spirit of religion, should discourse of it as the apostle did with pathos and energy; or indeed how he should properly explain those devout exercises of the mind, and those various painful struggles of a truly Christian heart with which he is totally unacquainted. Besides, the duties of the ministry are of such a nature, and attended with such numerous discouragements, that it is not imaginable a man wholly destitute of the love of God and his fellow-creatures, should have a heart, at least for any length of time, for the zealous and cheerful discharge of them.

On the contrary, a firm persuasion of the truths he teaches, and a lively sense of their excellence, sweetness and importance, will greatly assist and forward a minister in the discharge of his duty. Feeling his own personal obligations to Christ, and ardently wishing to be the instrument of saving men's souls and making them happy for ever, he will preach, not like a dry, cold, sleepy philosopher, but with a warmth and animation, especially on some occasions, wonderfully adapted to engage the attention and affections of his hearers. The apostle felt his religion, and so he spake warmly as well as soberly. From his feelings as well as his understanding he addressed his audience at Athens, Antioch, and Cesarea. And it was his eager vehement manner, that was one ostensible ground, as we have shewn, of the charge of insanity exhibited against him by Festus in our text. A minister too being a hearty friend

as well as a servant of Christ, will be restrained by a principle of ingenuous love, from many improprieties of conduct he would otherwise fall into, and be prompted to many exertions he would otherwise slothfully decline.

And thus appears beyond a doubt the importance of personal religion to the character of a Christian minister. This sort of learning is absolutely indispensable. Let us then my brethren, look well to this! The glory of God, the success of our ministry, and our own comfort are all concerned. This learning indeed comes from God, as does every good and perfect gift. But there is a duty lying upon us. He teaches, and we are to learn. Let us go then, and meekly sit as Mary did at the feet of our divine Master, and humbly intreat him to lead us into an experimental acquaintance with our own hearts, and with the vital salutary influence of his sacred doctrine. Let us beseech him to diffuse the savour of this heavenly knowledge through our breasts, and to give us that anointing of God which abideth in those who have received it. Let us cultivate this learning, of all others the most important, by diligent self-examination, by frequent reading and meditation, and by fervent prayer and supplication.

To proceed

II. There is a kind of learning, distinguishable from what we have been speaking of, that is necessary to qualify a man to be a Christian minister.

It is not every Christian that is called of God to instruct others. There are gifts peculiar to the ministry, and absolutely necessary to it, gifts which come from God, and which are capable of being cultivated and improved by attention and industry. Let me point out these to you, and represent their utility, to the purpose especially of enabling men to reason, like the apostle, soberly; and to persuade, like him, with energy.

No one surely would take it into his head to suppose, that a dumb man is called of God to be a public speaker. With very nearly as little reason would one suppose that a person wholly destitute of what we call elocution, should be destined by divine providence to the character of a Christian minister.

A bishop, we are told, and it is equally true of other ministers, should be *apt to teach*. They should not only have the organs of speech, and a voice that may be heard, but a natural, easy, agreeable faculty of speaking. Now though elocution is the gift of God, it is capable of being improved. And will any one say that it is not the duty of a candidate for the ministry to make use of every means within his compass to that end? Is there not a fitness in his being taught to avoid such improprieties of accent, tone, and gesture as may hurt his hearers, give a mistaken turn to his meaning, and excite unfavourable ideas of vanity and affectation? And is there not, I ask, a fitness in his being taught how to modulate his voice, so that he may be understood, and how to carry his meaning by sounds that will not offend but please? A little of this sort of learning is necessary—necessary I mean, in order to a man's being intelligible and acceptable.

Common sense is another necessary requisite to the character of a Christian minister. A fool may be wise unto salvation, but it does not thence follow that he is qualified to be an instructor of others. Nor yet do I mean to say that wit, genius, or extraordinary natural parts are necessary to enable a man to dispense the gospel. But surely a good understanding, a sound judgment, and a retentive memory, are qualities of great importance to a Christian teacher. How should he who has little or no discernment, state and explain divine truths? He who has no ability to compare and separate his ideas, reason and infer? He who has no inventive faculty or power of recollection, illustrate and persuade? And he who cannot arrange and methodize his thoughts, instruct and edify? These powers are the gifts of God, and we may reasonably presume that the man who is wholly destitute of them, whatever talents he may have for talking, and however loud and sonorous his voice may be, is not called of God to preach. Now a plain good understanding is certainly capable of being cultivated and improved. God can, if he please, in a preternatural manner strengthen and enlarge men's faculties; he can pour knowledge instantaneously into their minds; and he can enable them without any premeditation or study to speak intelligibly

and instructively to their hearers. Such miraculous interpositions and assistances were frequent in the first age of Christianity. The circumstances of the times made them necessary, though they were not even then granted with a view to supersede all attention to the natural and proper means of improvement in human and divine knowledge. But miracles are now ceased. There is no further occasion for them. And though we may still expect the instruction and assistance of the Holy Spirit in an ordinary way, yet it would be presumption in any to ask and hope for those blessings, while they lived in the allowed neglect of those means of cultivating their understanding which reason and the Bible direct us to.

And now what are those means, or what is that learning by which the understanding and judgment of a young person are to be improved, in order to his becoming capable of reasoning like the apostle, soberly? Surely none can be at a loss here. One would wish him to learn to read: for if he cannot read he will be shut out from many useful and necessary sources of information. One would wish him to learn to write, for the purpose of enabling him to think more closely, and to retain many things that might otherwise be lost. One would wish him to learn his mother tongue, that he might speak intelligibly, and not confound his hearers by gross improprieties of speech. One would wish him to learn by books and proper instructors, how to range his ideas methodically, that his preaching may not be incoherent unedifying declamation. One would wish him to be instructed in the art of reasoning, that he may see where the turn of an argument lies, may be on his guard against the sophisms of adversaries, and may be able to set truth before the eyes of his hearers in a clear and convincing light. One would wish him to be acquainted with the evidence of natural and revealed religion, to have a comprehensive view of the great doctrines of Scripture, and of the various modes of opposing and defending them; to understand the connection between sacred and profane history; to be versed in the customs of patriarchal and Jewish times, and to have an idea of the constitution of the Christian church, and the events that happened to it in primitive times.

This sort of learning in the general, I wont say in the extent or degree of it which some have happily acquired, is necessary to qualify a man to be an able minister of the New Testament. Suppose a man to be wholly uninstructed in these matters, though he may have a smooth tongue, a confident countenance, and in the idea of weak people a great deal of zeal, he will make an ill figure as a Christian minister in the eye of sober and thoughtful men. Not to speak of inaccuracies of language, which may and ought to be overlooked, his thoughts, if he may be said to think at all, will be crude and indigested, his preaching will be mere declamation and rhapsody, the sense of Scripture will be often mistaken, doctrines will be mis-stated and proved by insufficient arguments, metaphors will be miserably mangled, and puerilities, solecisms and absurdities obtruded upon the people, instead of serious, substantial and edifying truth. And I ask, is there not too much of such preaching in our times? Can it be right? Will any sober person say it is? Did our Saviour and his apostles discourse after this manner? And is it to be wondered that multitudes, averse enough naturally to what is good, are by these means confirmed in their prejudices against the truth?

To return. If then this sort of learning is, at least in a degree, necessary, and if it is not now to be got in a preternatural way, does it not follow that the man upon whom God has bestowed his grace, to whom he has given both bodily and mental powers adapted to the business of teaching, and who is on right principles disposed to devote himself to this arduous service; I say does it not follow that such a man ought to use all the means within his reach for acquiring the knowledge we have been recommending? It is the language of reason and of Scripture, as we shall hereafter shew, that he should. And at the same time, while he sits at the feet of others for instruction, and diligently reads and studies, his eyes should no doubt be devoutly directed to him from whom all gifts come, for divine instruction, assistance and success.——We have now to observe,

III. That there are further branches of learning, which,

though not necessary, are highly ornamental and useful to a Christian minister.

What wise man, whose life is to be spent in study and in teaching others, would not be glad to possess the key which commands access to a prodigious treasure of knowledge both natural and divine? But whether a minister has or has not a taste for the writings of the Greeks and Romans, methinks his veneration for the holy Scriptures must needs excite in his breast a wish to be acquainted with the languages in which they were written. I do not say that the being versed in Latin, Greek and Hebrew is necessary to make a man an able, useful and successful preacher of the gospel. Many destitute of this knowledge, yet blessed with good natural sense, a clear and comprehensive view of the gospel, and a warm and affectionate heart, have shone with distinguished lustre in the Christian church. God has been with them, and greatly owned their labours. Yet with all these advantages they have felt, and ingenuously acknowledged, the inconvenience of not having wherewith to draw from the original fountain of divine truth. Besides the pleasure resulting from this attainment, its utility to satisfy a man's mind on various points which he must otherwise take upon trust, to enable him to elucidate many difficult passages, and to qualify him to answer the objections of gainsayers, must strike every sober judicious person. Why then should not a serious young man who has promising talents for the ministry, devote his early years, if opportunity offers, to this useful study? Why should not he wish to be a man of letters, to acquire τὰ βιβλία τὰ γραμματα as well as the apostle Paul?

The word philosophy may sound very uncouth in the ears of some people, but if we mean by it the love of wisdom, or a diligent enquiry into the works of nature, in order to collect thence enlarged and exalted ideas of the perfections of deity; there is surely nothing in it incongruous with the views of a Christian. This however was the pleasant and frequent study of David the man after God's own heart, and of Solomon who was a preacher as well as a king. The magnitude, distances, and revolutions of the heavenly bodies, and the curious me-

chanism of a reptile or a spire of grass, may not only exercise and entertain the inquisitive mind of a minister of Jesus, but furnish him with many apt similies to illustrate the doctrines of religion, and many arguments to confirm their truth. Our Saviour and his apostles by these steps led their hearers up to the contemplation of heavenly and divine things. The former deigned to descant on the beauties of a lily, and to compare the splendour of its raiment with the royal robes of Solomon. And the latter knew how, when occasion required, to discourse of bodies celestial and bodies terrestrial, of one glory of the sun, another of the moon, and another of the stars.

Morality, or the original grounds on which all our obligations and social duties stand, is of no small use, not only to enable a man to decide upon many casuistical questions, but to point out the perfect agreement there is between the law of nature, and of the Bible. Well versed in this knowledge, a Christian minister will be the better qualified to set the internal evidence of divine revelation in its true light, to deal with the consciences of men on the guilt they have contracted, to expose the just demerit of sin, to vindicate the sanction of the divine law, to shew the expedience, necessity and glory of the mediation of Christ, and to explain and enforce all the duties of obedience. The apostle Paul well understood this argument, and upon this ground raises the infinitely magnificent superstructure of the gospel in his epistle to the Romans. Can any one then be offended at a young student's being initiated in ethical knowledge?

The study of history, in which I include the science of human nature, the policies, laws and customs of mankind, and the revolutions and events which have happened to empires, kingdoms, states and bodies of men, is certainly both an entertaining and useful study. From a memory well stocked with these materials, a fertile invention and a sound judgment will know how to collect a rich variety of arguments to illustrate and enforce popular instructions, admonitions and reproofs. And will any one say, that it is an advantage to a minister to be wholly ignorant of what has been done and is doing in the world, and to have no other source from whence

to derive his knowledge of mankind, but the narrow circle in which he himself moves?

Under these general heads of learning might be classed a great many distinct sciences adapted to the various genius and taste of mankind. Nor is there one of them, provided the study of it does not engross too much time and intrench upon other duties, but may some way or other assist a minister in his work, and subserve the grand object he has in view.

One proposition therefore, I flatter myself, we have clearly and fully established, that divine and human learning are of great importance to enable a man to reason soberly and intelligibly of the things of God, and to persuade with due warmth and energy.

And now, in order rightly to improve this argument to the purpose of the present meeting, let us enquire,

How it comes to pass that the learning we have been recommending is treated by many with indifference if not contempt.

As to divine learning, that men of corrupt minds, and whose hearts are wholly set on the world, should see no charms in the knowledge of God and religion to captivate their attention, is not to be wondered at. So it is, and so it always has been. But that any who profess a sincere regard to religion should treat the doctrine of divine instruction, or the teachings of the Holy Spirit, with levity and indifference is truly astonishing. So far is this doctrine from savouring of enthusiasm that it is perfectly agreeable with the dictates of right reason and sound philosophy. And they who will affirm it is unscriptural, must either annihilate a great part of their Bibles, or else tell us that the writers of that venerable book did not speak to the common sense of mankind. It is no doubt the duty of those who would know God to seek after him, if haply they may find him. Meditation, reading and prayer are the means appointed for acquiring divine knowledge. But it is as stupid as it is impious for any one to assert that he who made the human mind cannot illuminate it, and that he who has given men a power to persuade one another cannot himself persuade. *They shall be all taught of God*, was the language of the prophets;

and *no man can come unto me, except the Father draw him*, was the doctrine of our Lord Jesus. We cannot indeed give a physical account of the manner in which a divine influence is exerted on the mind. But this is not to be objected to the fact itself. If it were, the impossibility of accounting physically for that influence which pervades through the creation, and gives life, motion and energy to millions of beings, might with equal reason be objected to this latter fact, notorious to all. In both cases the effect proves the cause, though we cannot explain the operation of that cause; and in both cases, the fact itself that a divine influence is exerted, is clearly affirmed in the word of God. How is it then that men of common sense should treat all ideas of divine operations on the human mind as enthusiastic and groundless? It is to be accounted for two ways, their unwillingness to admit that the ignorance and depravity of mankind are so great as to render such operation necessary—and the disgust they have received from the extravagancies of too many wild enthusiasts who have boasted of illuminations, feelings and impulses, the true causes of which may be easily explained, and the effects of which prove to a demonstration that they do not come from God.

But the question I mean at present chiefly to insist on is, How it comes to pass that many good people should treat human learning with indifference if not contempt, and consider all prudent measures to initiate those in it who have gifts for the ministry as nugatory if not criminal? That there should be prejudices of this kind in any minds, may seem very strange. But groundless as they are they will be found upon examination to admit of some excuse; and proceeding, as we may charitably conclude, in some persons from good principles, they should be treated not with animosity but tenderness. For it should here be carefully observed, that the disgust we wish to remove from all minds, originates in some from very different motives from what it does in others. We ought therefore to cherish in our breasts the warmest love to our Christian brethren who though mistakenly yet conscientiously differ from us on this matter; while at the same time we insist that the

tempers and conduct of others are deserving of very severe reprehension. But what are these prejudices?

1. The first I shall mention is *mistaken apprehensions of learning itself.* Some good people have been accustomed to conceive of divine and human learning in direct opposition to each other. And of consequence the warmer their attachment to the former is, the greater must be their dislike of the latter. If that is true, excellent and important, then this must be false, contemptible and injurious. But the conceit is groundless. The learning we have been recommending is true learning, and between that and divine learning there is, there can be no disagreement. They are in perfect unison with each other. And though it does not come so immediately from God as that, it is not on this account inconsistent with it. Its being conveyed through a medium does not change its nature. What error, what fault, what impropriety is there in learning the languages which are the channels that convey divine as well as human knowledge to us? There is such a thing indeed as *opposition of science falsely so called,* but science truly so called is friendly to the gospel. Sound philosophy is so far from casting a shade over Christianity, or at all weakening the foundations of it, that it contributes not a little to illustrate and confirm it. Profane history throws a light upon sacred history, and a knowledge of human nature and the world, tends to establish the observations, maxims and counsels of God's holy word. If all this be true, then the prejudice we are combating is founded in mistake, and ought upon grounds of consistence to be rejected. But how shall we convince those who are confessedly ignorant of the point in question, of their mistake? If they will not take our testimony, let them be at the pains of acquiring human learning themselves, or be ingenuous enough to acknowledge that they are not competent judges of the matter they so hastily pronounce upon.—But say you,

2. "*Human learning makes men vain, proud and conceited, and therefore ministers had better be without it.*"

Why truly if this were the case, that is to say, if this were its natural and proper tendency, they had better be without it.

But this is not the natural and proper tendency of learning. If it operates as it should do it will make men humble. The first lesson a scholar has to learn is that he knows nothing: and in proportion to the progress he makes in real learning, so will his progress be in humility and modesty. The higher we rise towards the summit of human knowledge, the more clearly shall we discern the follies and mistakes we have been guilty of in our way to it, and therefore shall be less vain, positive and assuming. The apostle indeed tells us, that knowledge puffeth up. False knowledge always does so, and a little learning, or the mere semblance of it, will have this effect. But even admitting that vanity sometimes attends real knowledge, this happens not through any fault in knowledge itself, but through the depravity of the human heart. And the very same thing may be said in some cases of divine as well as natural knowledge. For however the knowledge of God and ourselves will upon the whole abase and humble us; yet extraordinary attainments in religion sometimes become an occasion of exciting vanity. The apostle himself was in danger of being exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelation with which he was distinguished from others. This therefore is no just ground of prejudice against human learning.

But let us take the matter the other way, and ask, Does not ignorance make men vain, proud, and conceited? It does. And in nothing perhaps does their vanity shew itself more than in their contemptuous treatment of learning. As the surly Diogenes trampled on Plato's finery with more pride than Plato enjoyed it, so these men abuse what they know nothing about with more vanity than *they* commend it, who have been at great pains to acquire it. And what is peculiarly disgusting, whilst they are declaiming against learning, their very manner betrays self-applause, and a wish to be thought ingenious and even learned too. But is not such conceit very reprehensible? Can it possibly be passed upon mankind for either wit or religion? one would think not. Since however it is ignorance that creates such idle vanity, what can we do better than *as* heartily wish these foolish people to be without ignorance, *as* they mistakenly do ministers to be without

learning? But the persons with whom we are now concerned are not all of them vain and conceited. And *they* will be apt again to object,

3. *Learning hath been abused.* True, it has. And what then? Is it the worse for having been abused? Shall I quarrel with my food, because there are such people as gluttons and drunkards in the world? Or shall I think the less honourably of the grace of God, because there have been those who have turned it into lasciviousness? It may have been prostituted by men of corrupt minds to the purpose of propagating infidelity and irreligion; and errors of a very gross and dangerous kind may have received some sort of aid from it. But is it on these accounts to be rejected? Is a good weapon the worse for an enemy's having used it? Did David refuse the sword which the Priest offered him because it was Goliah's? No. He was the better pleased with it: give it me, says he, for there is none like that.

On the contrary, learning has under God very essentially served the cause of religion. To this we owe the best demonstrations of the being and perfections of God, the noblest defences of divine revelation, and the most satisfactory illustrations and proofs of the peculiar doctrines of Christianity.

4. But you will say, "Though it has upon occasion served the cause of religion, yet *ordinary ministers may do without it.*"

True, they may teach men the knowledge of God and the way of salvation, without being skilled in the languages and sciences. But to say that a man who is wholly destitute of human learning can instruct others, is a very great mistake. For if God has so ordered it that we must read and study, in order to acquire knowledge; and reason and discourse, in order to communicate it, these means are no doubt necessary to the ends of their appointment. And for a man, especially under the character of a minister, not to take pains to learn to read and study, and to reason and discourse, is both absurd and sinful.

5. But you will perhaps further insist, "*The less human learning a minister has, the more will the power and grace of God be magnified in the success of his preaching.*"

And what then? Are we therefore to neglect the means God has appointed? Miracles no doubt afford a more splendid display of divine power than the ordinary operations of nature. Are we therefore to expect miracles? Infinite wisdom thought fit thus to interpose in the infancy of Christianity. The apostles had the gifts of tongues, and ability to speak on any subject as occasion required without previous instruction from men. But miracles are now ceased. What then is to be done? Why, gifts for the ministry, which come now from God as well as then, though not in the degree and perfection they were enjoyed by the apostles, are to be improved into a ripeness for public use and exertion by reading, meditation and prayer. Wherefore to neglect these means is to find fault with the order God has established: And to say, "the more inconsiderable and unimproved a man's abilities are, the more the power and grace of God will be magnified," is in effect to say, "Do evil, or at least leave your duty undone, that good may come." Were the husbandman to leave off plowing and sowing under the idea of the providence of God being more conspicuous in his reaping without any of these previous exertions; or a pretended Christian to treat the duties of morality and religion with contempt, under the notion of the grace of God being the more displayed in his salvation; we should pronounce the one an Enthusiast, and the other a miserable Antinomian. But still,

6. You ask, "*Does not the Scripture pour contempt on human learning?*"

It does on false learning, on the pride of learning, on the abuse of learning, and on human learning, when put in competition with divine learning. But it no where insinuates any thing to the prejudice of sound learning. Indeed it is impossible it should. For if it did, it would confound right and wrong, truth and falsehood, which surely it would be the height of impiety to suppose the blessed God can do. It inveighs warmly, and most justly too, against all the arts of beguiling rhetoric and false philosophy, the *enticing words of man's wisdom, idle fables, endless genealogies, vain jangling, strifes of words, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds,*

and opposition of science falsely so called. But it no where tells us that grammatical, physical, or historical truth is to be rejected, or the knowledge of it to be despised. Solomon was well versed in all these branches of learning. Elisha was extraordinarily called of God, but he was so far from having any animosity against the sons of the prophets, that he assisted in building them a school. Eloquent as Apollos was, and mighty too in the Scriptures, he was glad of the instruction of Aquila and Priscilla. The apostle does not tell Festus, he had injured him by saying he had much learning. He had it, he used it, he improved it. The Corinthians he exhorts, *forasmuch as they were zealous of spiritual gifts, to seek to excel for the edifying of the church.* Timothy he admonishes, *to give attendance to reading; to neglect not the gift that was in him; to study to shew himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth; to meditate on these things, to give himself wholly to them, that his profiting might appear to all.*—Is then Scripture an enemy to useful learning?

7. "But, say you, *ministers who have little human learning, are yet many of them greatly owned and succeeded.*"

True. But these modest excellent men are none of them wholly without learning. They see the utility of it. They would be glad to have more of it. They take pains to get it. But our churches many of them cannot afford them a sufficient support to enable them to devote their whole time to study. In such case a minister must do the best he can, and he may hope for all needful and reasonable assistance from above. And indeed God has blessed the labours of persons thus circumstanced to the conversion and edification of many. But will any man of common sense infer from thence that what we have been recommending is of little or no use? Besides, it is an indisputable fact that great multitudes of pious ministers, in this as well as other countries, endowed with considerable abilities and with a large stock of human learning, have been eminently useful and successful in the church of God. Read the writings of the primitive fathers, confessors and martyrs; study the history of the reformation; consider well the charac-

ters and labours of many excellent men in the church of England, of no less than two thousand who for the sake of conscience were ejected thence in the last century, and of many among the Dissenters since that time; and you will acknowledge this to have been the case.

If then the objections that have been urged have so little weight in them, as I flatter myself you are convinced they have, how is it that any good people among us should be so much prejudiced against learning? Have they duly considered these things? Are they in a temper to consider them? Let me ask you, my friends, if any such are here, Why should you be at so much pains to set religion and common sense at variance?—to persuade men that that which is most friendly to truth is inimical to the gospel? What is there so frightful in the countenance of learning, that you must fly from it as from a spectre? What misdeeds has it been guilty of, that you must raise a hue and cry after it, as after a thief? Spend your zeal, if you will, and do your utmost against false learning. But take heed how you speak disrespectfully of true learning. The apostles had it. All wise and good men have it. Not a minister of Jesus, let him be as plain as he will, is wholly without it. Let me beseech you then to forbear vilifying what you are ignorant of. And if you have any love to Christ and any tenderness for the souls of men, be afraid lest by your mistaken reasonings and ill tempers you should induce a suspicion that religion is mere enthusiasm, and that the blessed gospel is all a cheat. But I hope better things of you. If however any will pertinaciously resist the force of all these reasonings, one would be almost tempted to fear that there were another prejudice at the bottom, which yet candour would teach us if possible not to admit, and that is, a jealousy that some inconvenience may arise to them from their ministers knowing more than themselves. But this we would hope is not the case. Many will, I persuade myself, ingenuously acknowledge that human learning, provided it keeps its proper station, and is not abused, is of great utility to a Christian minister.

But some of these worthy persons will perhaps say, "We do not quarrel with learning; we only ask, Is it right to send

those who have gifts and are called of God to exercise them, to seminaries of learning for education?"

If by their having gifts and being called to exercise them, you mean their being sufficiently qualified to enter immediately upon all the public duties of the ministry, there would be force in the objection. No wise good man would wish to suppress gifts which God has bestowed, or to hold back those a moment from their duty whom God has called to go abroad immediately into the world to preach the gospel. But the matter is otherwise. The persons we would advise to a regular course of study, are such as have promising talents for the ministry, but whose talents are not sufficiently ripe for the purpose to which they are by and by to be applied. That there are persons of this description will scarce be denied—persons who have a deep sense of religion, good natural abilities, an earnest desire to devote themselves to the service of the sanctuary, and whose tender age will admit of their applying themselves to close study for three or four years. To say that such persons should be instantly precipitated into the ministry is certainly wrong. We have already shewn that gifts are capable of being improved; and no doubt youthful age, a strong bent to study, and favourable opportunities of receiving instruction, ought to be considered as the voice of God clearly pointing out to such persons what is their duty. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, on whom the gifts of the Holy Spirit were poured in their largest profusion, retired a while, and at the age of thirty-two, before he appeared upon the public stage of life. And with respect to those who are not of tender years, if, while they are receiving instructions suited to their more advanced age and circumstances, they have opportunities of exercising their gifts occasionally, it cannot surely with an appearance of truth be said, that their gifts are stifled and the will of Providence opposed.

But you will say, "Though it may be allowable for persons to apply themselves to learning; yet what occasion for erecting seminaries for the purpose of educating or preparing young men for the ministry? This looks too much like arrogating to yourselves the authority of making ministers, and invading the

office of the ascended Saviour, who hath received gifts for men, and bestows them in what manner and proportion he pleases."

. That gifts are capable of being improved, that proper measures are to be taken to that end, and that the so doing is no expression of inattention, but rather of obedience to Christ, has been already shewn. The question therefore, and the only question to be debated here is, What are the proper measures to be taken? No doubt institutions of the kind we mean to recommend have been abused. Modes of instruction have been adopted ill suited to the ends proposed; young people have been admitted totally destitute of the grace of God; after a certain course of study they have been obtruded, full of pride and conceit, on the ministry, and the ministry itself has come to be considered as a mere trade or calling. All this is too true, and cannot be enough lamented. But shall these sad facts drive us into the opposite extreme, and because we would not have the Christian ministry a mere art or profession, shall we deprive it of that assistance which Providence has graciously afforded it? Men may no doubt by their own industry collect a great deal of useful knowledge. But all who know what learning is, will admit that the most natural method of acquiring it is under the direction of proper tutors, and in connection with those who are pursuing the same object, and will be likely to assist and emulate one another. This method, so obvious to common sense, was adopted by pious men in the early ages of the world, and in times too when miraculous gifts were frequent. And it had evidently the divine approbation, if it were not, as is probable, of divine appointment. The schools of the prophets at Bethel, Jericho and Gilgal were eminent in their time. Those who went thither for instruction were called *sons of the prophets.* Those who taught them were qualified for that purpose, and are supposed to have been commonly if not always inspired prophets. But not to speak of the number of these students, their exercises and manner of life, of which many hints are given us in Scripture, it seems plain that those who were chosen of God to be prophets were generally taken out of these schools. Wherefore Amos speaks of his case as being out of the ordinary course, that *he was not*

one of the sons of the prophets, but an herdsman and a follower of the flock.

And now if from these schools of the ancient prophets I were to turn your attention to the institution before us; if I were to give you the characters of the worthy ministers who preside over it, to remind you of the strict attention paid to the piety of those admitted into it, to describe the course of learning pursued and the prudent regulations to which it is subjected, to tell you of the frequent opportunities the students have for conferring on the things of God, and the encouragement given to their gifts abroad, when it becomes fit they should appear in public; were I to represent all these matters particularly to you, methinks the objection I am now combating would instantly submit, and you would acknowledge, that this mode of promoting the interests of true learning among us is most fit and prudent, and worthy of your ready countenance and support.

But I have run out too far. We must not however conclude without addressing ourselves in a few words to our young friends who are pursuing their studies in this seminary with a view to the ministry; and to those who are disposed, I am well persuaded, from the best motives to assist them therein.

Many useful admonitions have been given you, my dear young brethren, on these occasions, to which I must refer you, as my time will not allow me to be particular. Permit me, however, to remind you in the general of a few things, which you will readily admit are deserving of your most serious attention.

I beseech you, first of all, and allow me to do it with all possible earnestness and affection, to make vital, experimental, practical religion your grand object. It has pleased God to bestow his grace upon you, and you are come hither, I trust, with the noblest views, to improve yourselves in that knowledge we have been recommending. But the most rapid progress you may make in human learning, will avail you little, if divine learning be not the main thing with you. O cultivate that with all possible diligence! Converse much with God and

your own hearts. Read the Scriptures and other religious books with a devotional as well as critical view. Be frequent and earnest in your prayers to God for the enlightening and quickening influences of the Holy Spirit. Attend sincerely on all the means of religion. Endeavour to spread the savour of it among all around you, and try which can outvie the other in the genuine spirit of vital Christianity. Your comfort, your honour, your usefulness depends much on your growth in grace. And let me add, the fervour of your piety will have a great effect to silence those objections to an attention to learning which we have been endeavouring to obviate.

Be diligent, my friends, in your studies. Desultoriness ill becomes any, but more especially a student. Apply with attention to the object before you. Take each branch of learning in its order. Do not anticipate, for that will confound. Aim as far as you can to make yourselves masters of what you are about. Endeavour to excel. Let not difficulties discourage you. It may be a rough path you have to tread, and of painful ascent, but it will carry you to a spot, whence you will have a prospect that will richly repay all your fatigue and labour. And let the consideration of the important uses to which your knowledge is to be applied, animate you in your pursuit. Who knows what eminent services you may hereby be enabled to render to the church of God, and to the immortal souls of men?

Your cordial esteem and veneration for my worthy brethren who have the direction of your studies, will induce you, I am well persuaded, not only to submit to their opinion in matters of literature, but to their prudent counsel in all matters respecting your conduct. Consider them not only as your superiors and preceptors, but as your patrons and friends. Your respectful and affectionate attachment to them, will tend greatly to soften their labours, and accelerate your own improvements. Love as well as honour them, for they have your interests at heart.

And let me beseech you, as you advance in knowledge to advance in humility. Do not be conceited, positive, and dogmatical. I have no reason in the world to apprehend that you

are in the least disposed so to be. But knowledge does sometimes puff up. Beware of that evil. Sit humbly at the feet of instruction. Modesty is an argument of wisdom. It will do you honour in the view of all.

Thus improving in knowledge both human and divine, and thus conducting yourselves with all humility, seriousness, and prudence, you will not only lay a foundation, with the blessing of God, for your own future usefulness, but you will contribute greatly to the prosperity of this excellent institution. The sons of the prophets, on an occasion, besought Elisha that they might go to the woods near Jordan, and take thence each man a beam to enlarge their school, their dwelling. The prophet said, Go ye; and went himself with them! So you, my friends, wish to see this house of knowledge enlarged. Gladly would you assist to that end. Go then and do as we have presumed to advise you, and the object will be obtained, Your house will be built up, your dwelling will be enlarged, its simplicity and beauty will attract the regard of all who behold it, the sons of the prophets will flock to it, and both ministers and people will hail you—Blessed of the Lord.

Which leads me to say one word to you, my friends, who generously assist this very useful institution. I have to return you the thanks of those who are immediately benefited by your benevolence, the thanks of the churches which are hereby essentially served, and may I not add the thanks of all wise and good men: You will with pleasure accept them. Go on and prosper. Keep your eyes steadily directed to the grand object, the glory of God, the spread of the gospel, and the salvation of the immortal souls of men. To the blessed Emmanuel you owe infinite obligations. You can never fully discharge them. Be not weary therefore in well doing, in due time ye shall reap if ye faint not. And to all your exertions for promoting the cause of truth and religion, add your fervent prayers to Heaven for the divine concurrence and blessing.

A

SERMON

IN COMMEMORATION OF THE

GREAT STORM OF WIND, NOV. 27th, 1703;

AND OF THE

MORE DREADFUL STORM WHICH THREATENED THE DESTRUCTION OF BRITISH FREEDOM, AT THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION:

PREACHED

NOVEMBER 27th, 1788.

PSAL. LXXVII. 11.—*I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old.*

THE memory is a very useful faculty of the human mind, and is never employed to so noble a purpose as when directed to events wherein the wisdom, power, and goodness of God have been extraordinarily displayed. Such a use of the memory is a happy mean to promote genuine piety, and is therefore recommended in the Scriptures, and ever urged on their hearers, by those whose office it is to instruct men in the interesting concerns of religion.

It was in a time of deep affliction that the prophet Asaph penned this psalm. His affliction he pathetically describes in the former part of it, and then informs us of the expedient he had recourse to, in order to compose his ruffled mind, and exhilarate his fainting spirits. He said, *I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember thy wonders of old.*

The grand event he had in his eye was, that glorious revolution in favour of the Israelitish nation, which took place at the memorable era of their deliverance from Egyptian slavery. This was the work of God, accompanied with a series of wonders, the remembrance of which was to be transmitted to the latest ages. God reigns both in the natural and moral world. These were each convulsed in an unusual manner on this extraordinary occasion. The tempest rose to a great height. But He who hath his way in the whirlwind, and in the storm, rebuked the tempest, and there was a calm. The scene is strikingly described in the words that follow the text:

Who is so great a god as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders; thou hast declared thy strength among the people. Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. The waters saw thee, O God, the waters saw thee: they were afraid; the depths also were troubled. The clouds poured out water, the skies sent out a

sound: thine arrows also went abroad. The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven: the lightnings lightened the world, the earth trembled and shook. Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known. Thou leddest thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Thus were the Israelites delivered by the miraculous interposition of divine Providence in their favour. The elements, under the direction and control of heaven, became hostile to their enemies and friendly to them: and by these means, as also by an influence exerted upon the mind of the haughty Pharaoh, and upon their own passions and prejudices, their escape from tyranny was effected, and the possession of their religious and civil liberties acquired and confirmed. And thus was the sovereign dominion of the great God, both in the natural and moral world, asserted and displayed. To a mind so afflicted as the psalmist's was, at the time he composed this psalm, a recollection of these events was peculiarly consolatory and enlivening.

And now, in the time of our affliction, let us imitate the example of the pious psalmist, and say, *We will remember the works of the Lord: surely we will remember thy wonders of old.* In the time, I say, of our affliction:—not such affliction as the Israelites endured in Egypt, or such as they many times afterwards felt, when their liberties were invaded by their enemies. No such affliction do we feel—no such affliction have we felt, since the family of Brunswick ascended the throne of these kingdoms; nor are we under any apprehension of the return of those sad feelings, which penetrated the hearts of our brave and pious ancestors towards the close of the last century. No, my friends, it is another kind of affliction we have been lamenting in our prayers to God—the calamity which hath befallen our good king, and the distress in which it hath involved our gracious queen, her numerous offspring, and a dutiful and loyal people. What heart but feels on this sad occasion? Sympathy pervades the whole land, and draws tears of commiseration from the eyes of thousands. To alleviate your sorrows by considerations suited to the peculiar nature of this af-

fiction, of which, blessed be God! there are many, is not my present object. The kind of service wherein we are now engaged will not admit of the attempt. Yet a remembrance of those *works of the Lord*, and of those *wonders of old*, which naturally fall within our view this day, may have an effect to console our minds even in this trouble, and to inspire us with confidence in the wisdom, power, and goodness of the great Governor of the universe.

The agency of divine Providence in the natural and moral world, is a truth capable of the clearest demonstration. And a bright illustration we have of this important truth, in the two events I am now to hold up to your view. I mean the deliverance of this country from the great storm of wind, which we have been used to commemorate this day: and its deliverance from a more tremendous storm, which threatened the total destruction of our civil and religious liberties, at the Revolution. Events that bear a striking analogy to each other, and to those referred to in the psalm whence I have taken my text. The greatness and goodness of God were eminently displayed in them; so that we may truly say, they were *the works of the Lord, and his wonders of old.* Permit me to give you a brief account of the one and the other; to mark those circumstances attending them, wherein the interference of Providence is most observable; and to exhort you to a suitable improvement of these things.

We begin with the great storm of wind which we are assembled this day to commemorate. It happened in the month of November 1703, and is supposed by a respectable writer, who has transmitted to us a particular account of it, to have been one of the most considerable tempests recorded in history since the general deluge. It had blown hard for about fourteen days before the 27th of November. The nearer that time approached, the more the tempestuousness of the weather increased. On Wednesday the 24th, the wind blew furiously, and did some damage. All the next day and night it continued with unusual violence. And the Friday morning it raged to such a degree, that few people had courage to venture abroad. But as the night came on it rose still higher,

and so increased till about six o'clock the next morning, when, if it had at all exceeded, it is supposed that nothing could possibly have withstood its fury.

Of the amazing strength and rapidity of the wind, we may form some idea from a well attested circumstance near Shaftesbury in the west. A stone of near four hundred weight, which had lain for some years fixed in the ground, fenced by a bank with a low stone wall upon it, was lifted up by the wind, and carried into a hollow way, distant, at least, seven yards from the place.

The night was excessively dark, which added great horror to the scene, and prevented any one's providing for his security abroad, had that been possible. And the wind, by its extraordinary violence, created a noise hoarse and dreadful, like thunder, which failed not to carry terror to every ear. There were also appearances in the heavens that resembled lightning. "The air," says the writer just referred to, "was full of meteors and fiery vapours, which," adds he, "I am apt to believe were the lightnings we have been told of: for I am of opinion that there was really no lightning, in the common acceptation of the term; for the clouds that flew with so much violence through the air, were not, to my observation, such as usually are freighted with thunder and lightning: the hurries nature was then in do not consist with the system of thunder." Some imagined the tempest was accompanied with an earthquake; but of this there was no clear proof, and it is easy to conceive how the senses might at such a time be imposed upon. The only mischief that did not happen, to make the night completely dreadful, was the firing of houses. And yet this calamity did befal a town in Norfolk, where the fire, fanned by the wind, burnt with such vehemence, that the inhabitants had no power to extinguish it.

From this short view of the material circumstances relating to the storm itself, the prodigious violence of the wind, the alarming sound heard in the heavens, and the dreadful darkness of the night; it will no doubt be concluded, that the general consternation was very great. "Horror and confusion," says my author, "seized upon all, whether on shore or at sea:

no pen can describe it, no tongue can express it, no thought conceive it, unless theirs who were in the extremity of it; and who, being touched with a due sense of the sparing mercy of their Maker, retain the deep impressions of his goodness upon their minds, though the danger be past." Whither to fly for security none knew, except those who had made God their refuge. To venture abroad was to rush into instant death; and to stay within afforded no other prospect than that of being buried under the ruins of a falling habitation: some in their distraction did the former, and met death in the streets; others the latter, and in their own houses received their final doom. The bishop of Bath and Wells, Dr. Richard Kidder and his Lady, were of this number. But these instances, through the kind interposition of Providence, were not so numerous as might be expected: and many remarkable deliverances there were, of which I shall presently mention some.

When the wind was thus risen to its greatest height, and with it the just fears of thousands, then did the God of heaven interpose. He who rules the storm checked the fury of it, "stayed the rough wind in the day of the east wind *a*." It gradually abated, till at length, after a week's tempestuous weather, a perfect calm ensued.—Such is the salvation we commemorate, and which none can doubt was of God.

And now it will be expected that I should give some account of the extent of this storm, and of the damage done by it. As to its extent, it shook all Europe. Having taken its rise probably in America, it made its way across the western ocean, and collecting confederate matter in its passage over the seas, spent its fury on these parts of the world, whither this army of terror was principally commissioned.

As to the desolation occasioned by this storm, it was not so considerable as might be imagined. Few lives, comparatively speaking, were lost. An account was taken of one hundred and twenty-three who were killed I suppose, by the fall of houses. But the number of those who were drowned, in the floods of the Severn and the Thames, and of those who were lost on the coast of Holland, and in ships blown away

a Isa. xxvii. 8.

and never heard of afterwards; is thought within compass to have been eight thousand. Above eight hundred dwelling houses were laid in ruins, in most of which the inhabitants received bruises, and some lost their lives. Few houses escaped being dismantled of their covering, which is clear from the prodigious rise of the price of tiles; for from twenty-one shillings a thousand it rose to six pounds. Above two thousand stacks of chimnies were said to have been blown down in and about London. One hundred churches covered with lead had their lead rolled up, and hurled in prodigious quantities to distances almost incredible. Stacks of corn and hay innumerable were thrown down, or so torn as to receive great damage. Multitudes of cattle were lost: in one level fifteen thousand sheep were drowned. And as to trees torn up by their roots, the writer before referred to says, he himself reckoned seventeen thousand of this description in Kent; when, tired with the number, he left off reckoning. In short, the damage, he affirms, exceeded that of the fire of London, which was estimated at four millions.

All sorts of people were affected by this storm: not a family that had any thing to lose, but lost something. The land, the houses, the churches, the corn, the trees, the rivers, all felt the fury of the wind. The shipping too suffered considerably. Of the royal navy there were twelve ships lost, and most of their crew. Eddistone lighthouse was destroyed, and in it Mr. Winstanley the ingenious contriver of it, and the people that were with him. Great numbers of merchant-ships were cast away, and above five hundred wherries, besides lighters and barges, on the river Thames. And yet, it is remarkable that the wind blowing from the western seas, and so preventing our ships, many of them, from putting to sea, and driving others into harbour; proved the occasion of great numbers escaping, that would otherwise have been lost.

Many other particulars might be mentioned, but it shall suffice to close this account of one of the most tremendous storms that perhaps ever happened, with taking notice of two or three remarkable deliverances, which, among many others, drew the attention of the public at that time. Above two

hundred men, cast away upon the Goodwin-sands, were saved, when at the point of being lost, by the humane and spirited exertions of Mr. Thomas Powell, of Deal, whose singular compassion and generosity it were to be wished might never be forgotten. Several accounts were published of persons in London, who marvellously escaped from their houses at the instant they fell in. But of these none is more striking, than the narrative of the escape of seventeen persons in a house in St. Martin's-lane. A stack of chimnies fell with such force on the house, as to carry the roof and all the floors quite down to the ground. Some few of the family ran out at the first alarm, and escaped: the greater part of them were buried under the ruins, but quickly after taken out with little or no hurt, so that they were all saved. This account is attested by Dr. Gideon Harvey, who lived in the adjoining house, and by Captain Theodore Collier and Mr. Robert Richards, the principal persons of the family. A salvation so extraordinary, and which happened at no very great distance from this place, needs no apology for being thus publicly mentioned.

Thus you have the event we are this day assembled to commemorate. And it ought, surely, to be remembered and acknowledged, with suitable expressions of reverence, seriousness, and gratitude. It was God that commissioned the wind to blow. His voice was in the tempest. And happy were they who received the instruction it was intended to give, and were obedient to it. The consciences of many were awakened at that awful time, but the impression quickly wore off, as too sadly appeared by a circumstance which cannot be recollected, by a serious mind, without real concern. A few nights after this alarming providence, a play was acted in one of our theatres, called *The Tempest*. Such was the wretched levity of the times! How is the patience of God to be admired, and the folly and impiety of men to be lamented!

There were, however, those who devoutly felt and acknowledged the power and goodness of that great Being, *whose way is in the whirlwind, and in the storm, and who makes the clouds the dust of his feet* a. Within my remembrance

a Nahum i. 3.

there were some, who retaining a grateful sense of the salvations they received at that time, were used to assemble with us on these anniversary occasions, to offer their tribute of cheerful praise to their Almighty Deliverer. And it was with the most pious views that the worthy Mr. Taylor, who was deeply affected with this extraordinary providence, instituted this yearly commemoration of it. May those views be happily answered, by suitable impressions made on our hearts on the present occasion! Verily, Sirs, there is a God that rules and judges in the earth. His power is irresistible, his justice impartial, and his goodness unbounded. The elements are at his disposal, and under his control: and he knows how, if he please, to afflict, to punish, to exterminate, a disobedient and incorrigible people. Famine, pestilence, earthquake, and the stormy tempest, have each of them been employed as the executioners of his wrath. Let us revere his infinite Majesty, acknowledge his universal dominion, confide in his power and goodness, and be obedient to his holy will.

And now it is time to turn our attention from the scene we have been contemplating, to another of a civil or political description, of which the former affords a striking emblem. We have just felt the horrors of the dark and dismal night that preceded the 27th of November 1703, when the winds blew, the skies blackened, the earth shook, and the hearts of men failed them with dismay; and we have enjoyed the happy calm that succeeded it. Let us now feel the horrors of that more dreadful tempest, which was impending on this country in the year 1688: and let us share with our pious ancestors in the joy they felt on the ever-memorable FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

Auspicious day! made famous many years before by the marvellous salvation of this country from the horrid machinations of Rome and hell; and rendered still more illustrious by the arrival of our glorious deliverer WILLIAM THE THIRD; a prince whose memory will ever be dear to the friends of civil and religious liberty. He pitied us in all our anguish, and he fled to our relief, resolving, with the help of God, to save us or to die in the attempt. "He came, he saw, he conquered." Tyranny turned pale, the arm of despotism was unnerved,

bigotry skulked into silence, persecution fled, and the black designs of the sons of darkness were frustrated. O the heart-felt joy of our patriotic and pious forefathers!—to see the prison doors thrown open, the fetters that had been forged in the abodes of darkness knocked off, and the fires of Smithfield, which had been again kindled in their imagination, extinguished!—to see a prince ascend the British throne, with a heart devoutly sensible of the interference of Providence, and anxiously meditating schemes for the full deliverance of the oppressed, and for securing and transmitting our rights and liberties to the latest posterity!

A century is no inconsiderable period in human affairs: and a century thus ushered in demands an attentive, joyful, and grateful commemoration. It is unwise not to call up these scenes to our view; it is impious not to acknowledge the hand of God in them. He looked from his holy habitation, heard the cries of an oppressed people, and commanded deliverance. The purpose, however, of the present occasion will be sufficiently answered, by a transient view of the gathering of this mighty storm, of its dissipation, and of the happy effects that followed; in all which the influence of divine Providence may, I think, be marked with a clearness that can scarce fail to convince, or at least confound an infidel.

The arbitrary and illegal measures of James I. and his son Charles I. laid the foundation of all the confusion and miseries of the civil war that followed. When the latter of these Princes had suffered on a scaffold, and when the struggles of contending parties, from various motives, for power, had subsided, his son Charles II. ascended the throne. An Act of indemnity was passed, and former animosities were to be buried in oblivion. Yet the men, to whom, for their concurrence in his Restoration, the king owed no small obligations of honour and conscience, and who had reason afterwards to blame themselves for not demanding other security than his word; these men, I say, quickly met with treatment the most ungrateful, cruel, and perfidious.

They were, indeed, allowed to bring forward their proposals for a reformation of the Liturgy, but as this measure was ac-

ceded to with no other view than to save appearances, it issued, as might be expected, without effect. Their reasonings were borne down with clamour, and their expostulations rejected with contempt. So upwards of two thousand ministers, eminent for their abilities and piety, were ejected out of the church, and deprived of their livings. This however, was only the beginning of sorrows.

An Act was quickly passed to render Dissenters incapable of certain offices of trust and profit *a*, an eligibility to which was their natural and just right in common with the rest of their fellow subjects. Every base method was taken to render them odious, and to excite the public resentments against them. Their most humble and earnest petitions for liberty to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences, were denied. Severe and inhuman laws were enacted against them. They were fined and persecuted even to death; many thousands of them perishing in dark and loathsome prisons. And these laws, although since laid asleep by the lenient hand of toleration, still remain unrepealed.

At length, the Popish faction gaining ground, it was judged expedient to pass a law *b*, disqualifying all from any share in the executive departments of government, who should decline taking the Sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England. In the passing this law, the Dissenters, from an unwillingness to obstruct a measure which in this time of imminent danger seemed necessary, acquiesced; though manifestly to the injury of their own natural rights. They, however, received assurances that provisions should be made for their relief; but these assurances were never carried into effect *c*. This Act, and that before referred to, (I mean the

a The Corporation Act, passed in the year 1662.

b The Test Act, passed in the year 1673.

c "It should be observed," says Dr. Furneaux, in his Letters to Judge Blackstone, "that the original design of the test was, not to exclude the Protestant Dissenters, but the Papists. See Burnet's History of his own Times, vol. i. p. 347—352, first edit. It was brought in by the patriots in the reign of Charles II. under their apprehensions of Popery and a Popish successor; and is styled, an 'Act for preventing dangers which may happen from Popish Recusants;' and the same is said to be its design in the preamble. And

Corporation Act) through the over-ruling providence of God, have operated to their no small advantage, by checking that fondness for worldly power and splendour, which is the bane of religion. A consideration which would create a total indifference in the breasts of many pious men to the repeal of those laws, so far as they regard the Protestant Dissenters; were it not for the further consideration, that they have proved, and still do prove, the unhappy occasion, in innumerable instances, of an horrid prostitution of the most sacred rite of our holy religion. A reflection which methinks cannot fail of giving pain to every thoughtful mind, as well in the Established Church as among the Dissenters. To proceed—

The king, become a bankrupt by his debaucheries, sold himself to France, and had the meanness to rank among the pensioners of Lewis, who aimed to enslave all the countries round him as well as his own. Urged to violent measures by his brother, who dared to avow his reconciliation to the Church of Rome, he so far yielded as to connive at the inroads Popery was making upon us. And after a while, having endangered his own personal safety by hesitating at the counsels of those about him, he took the bold resolution of leaping over the mounds of law and equity, and governing absolutely without

when, during the debate in the House of Commons, it was observed, that it was drawn in such a manner as to comprehend the Protestant Dissenters, the court party endeavoured to avail themselves of that circumstance in order to defeat the bill. But the dissenting members disappointed them, by declaring, that they had rather confide in the justice and generosity of parliament, to pass some future bill in their favour, than be the occasion of retarding or defeating the security, which the present bill was calculated to afford to the liberties of their country. And this genuine patriotism facilitated the passing of a bill then depending in the Commons, for their relief from the penal laws; (See Grey's Parliamentary Debates, vol. ii. p. 36, 38, 83.) which being sent up to the Lords, and coming down with some amendments, the parliament was suddenly prorogued through the resentment of the court, and the intended favour to the Dissenters prevented. See Grey's Parliamentary Debates, vol. ii. p. 180. And when afterwards, in the year 1680, a bill in favour of the Dissenters repealing the 35 Eliz. c. 1. passed both Houses, and lay ready for the royal assent, the court ventured upon a very extraordinary expedient: the clerk of the crown was ordered to convey away the bill; and accordingly, it was never afterwards to be found. Burnet, ubi supra, p. 494, 495."—*See Furneaux's Let. to Judge Blackstone*, 2d edit. p. 180, 181.

his Parliament. In this situation died the profligate and unprincipled Charles II. a Papist, there is reason to believe, by profession; and an infidel, it is to be feared, at heart.

Eager to pursue the plan of laying waste both the civil and religious liberties of this country, his brother James II. ascended the throne. The laws of Rome were on his heart, and the rod of tyranny was in his hand. Now the storm gathered thick around, the heavens lowered, the lightning flashed, the bellowing thunder came rolling on. Appearances were, however, in the beginning to be observed. To deceive the credulous, and, at the same time, to take off all restraints from those of his own communion, he published his proclamation of general indulgence; which, though it afforded present relief to the persecuted, yet, by the claim it made to a right of dispensing with the laws, convinced all considerate men that he aimed at arbitrary dominion. A Jesuit, who had been already made the keeper of his conscience, was called to the council-table. The rites of the Romish church were observed in all their pomp at court. Vacant chairs at the Universities were filled with Papists. A nuncio was solemnly received from Rome, and an ambassador sent thither with great parade. And seven bishops, who had the firmness to refuse compliance with his illegal commands, were committed prisoners to the Tower.

In this crisis of our affairs, when the friends of religion and liberty began to give up all for lost, an illustrious band of patriots arose, and, at the hazard of their property and their lives, confederated for our deliverance. Their counsels were wisely laid, and firmly executed. The Prince of Orange, who had married the daughter of James, they invited hither. He accepted their invitation. In a fleet fitted out by the States he embarked, and on the fifth of November, the day following his birth-day, landed at Torbay.

The wretched James was instantly forsaken by his flatterers, and at a loss to whom to look for counsel. Struck with a panic, he had not courage to resist the progress of the Prince towards London, or to wait the event of it. He stole from his palace by night, threw his seals into the Thames, fled in a

fishing-boat to France, and sought an asylum from a haughty tyrant, who had a little before washed his hands in the blood of thousands of his own innocent subjects. And now a dirge at his funeral was the best, if not the only, service his infatuated priests could render him.

Our deliverer in the mean time, in full confidence of the justice of his cause and the purity of his views, approached the metropolis, where he was received with the joyful acclamations of a people, who could scarce believe, amidst this scene of wonders, that the manacles were fallen from their hands, and they again free. A solemn Convention of the States was called, the rights of the subject were asserted and confirmed, crowns were placed on the heads of WILLIAM and MARY, and the constitution fixed on a basis more firm than it had ever before stood.

Thus arose out of the ruins of tyranny a building fair and beautiful, stately and majestic, solid and durable. A constitution which indeed existed before this period, but now received its noblest improvement and confirmation. A constitution which has liberty for its basis, and is so constructed by a due temperament of the powers of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, as to render it the happiest and most stable form of government on earth. The advantages resulting from it have been realized through a long course of years, which form a period the most illustrious of any to be met with in the history of mankind. Nor need we fear that a building thus reared, under the smiles of heaven, will receive any injury from the assaults of despotism, so long as national virtue, and a due regard to the authority of God, remain sacred among us.

The agency of divine Providence in this wonderful event ought to be diligently noticed, and devoutly acknowledged. To overlook it, or regard it only with a negligent eye, would argue great folly and ingratitude. Forbid it! O God, that Britons, that Protestants, that Protestant Dissenters should be chargeable with this enormous guilt. *It is the Lord's doing.* Let it be marvellous in our eyes.

Can we recollect the circumstances attending a revolution, which makes so distinguished a figure in the history of this country, and not clearly discern a superior influence therein?

If the old adage be true, that "whom God means to destroy he infatuates," it is beyond a doubt that James was infatuated of heaven. His precipitate conduct, immediately upon mounting the throne, in calling his priests about him; his sending a solemn embassy to Rome, where he was considered as acting the part of a madman; his unrelenting fury towards the insurgents in the west, through the medium of those bloody executioners of his vengeance, Jefferies and Kirk; his treatment of the bishops for doing their duty; his flying in the face of the laws, immediately upon his having sworn to observe them; his refusing the assistance of the arms of France, at the instant he stood most in need of them; and, to add no more, his duplicity in the business of the Oxford Popish professors: these, and many other political solecisms in his conduct, oblige us to acknowledge that he was devoted of God to ruin—of that God who meant by his just overthrow, when in the full career of tyranny, to save this afflicted and oppressed people.

Nor was the infatuation of this unhappy prince, the only character that marked the interference of Heaven. Many others concurred to direct our attention to that providence, which sat at the helm of our vessel, when thus torn by adverse winds, and at length conducted it to the desired haven. It was God who raised up those renowned patriots, whose exertions in the cause of expiring freedom will never never be forgotten. It was God who steeled their breasts against the dread of those tremendous evils, they had to apprehend from the vindictive spirit of a bigotted tyrant. It was God who inspired their counsels with wisdom, unanimity, and firmness. It was God who sent us the great, the good king William, commanding the winds to be obedient to his wishes *a*. It was

a The great storm that blew from the west, immediately upon the prince's landing, which prevented the king's fleet from continuing their pursuit, and so shattered them that they were no more fit for service that year, was a providential circumstance in favour of the Revolution, much regarded at that time. "I never found," says Bishop Burnet, "a disposition to superstition in my temper: I was rather inclined to be philosophical upon all occasions. Yet I must confess, that this strange ordering of the winds and seasons, just to change as our affairs required it, could not but make deep impressions on me, as well as on all that observed it. Those famous verses of Claudian

God who said of our deliverer, as he did of Cyrus, 'He is my Shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure. His right hand have I holden, to subdue nations before him: and I will loose the loins of kings to open the way before him. I will go before him, and make the crooked places straight: I will break the gates of brass, and cut asunder the bars of iron: that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides me, I am the Lord, and there is none else *a*.'

What remains then, my friends, but that we offer our most devout acknowledgments to God for this wonderful deliverance? Nor let us forget the salvation wrought out for us at the demise of queen Anne, when the designs of arbitrary power were again defeated, and the illustrious family of Brunswick ascended the throne of these kingdoms; for the securing which event the immortal king William took such wise precautions. Let us also recollect, with heart-felt joy and gratitude, the inestimable blessings we have enjoyed under the mild administrations of the two princes of this House who have already reigned; and that happy confirmation and enlargement which our religious liberties have received under the reign of his present Majesty. And while we tenderly feel with him and his afflicted family, in the mournful providence with which they are now visited, let us offer our fervent and repeated prayers to God, that tranquillity may be restored to his royal bosom, that he may again assume the reins of government with distinguished glory, and that, in the mean while, the deliberations of our great men, under the guidance of Heaven, may be directed to the happiest issue.

To conclude—Let us humble ourselves before God for our manifold sins, which have been aggravated by the magnitude

seemed to be more applicable to the Prince than to him they were made on;"

O nimium dilecte Deo, cui militat æther,
Et conjurati veniunt ad classica venti!
Heaven's favourite for whom the skies do fight,
And all the winds conspire to guide thee right.

See Burnet's Hist. of his own Times, vol. i. p. 789, 790, first edit.

a Isa. xliv. 28. xlv. 1—6.

of his favours conferred upon us. Let us retain a grateful remembrance of the obligations we owe to the noble exertions of our brave ancestors. Let the same ardour that inspired their breasts, in the glorious cause of civil and religious liberty, inflame ours. Let us heartily concur in every measure for emancipating our brethren of mankind, in remote parts, from the galling yoke of slavery; and for diffusing the knowledge of God and their duty among the rising generation at home. And, while we watch over our rights with a jealous eye, let us ever remember that a due regard to that subordination in society, which reason and religion teach, is one just and natural mean to secure them. Let us fear God, and honour the king. Let us lead holy and exemplary lives. And, in fine, let us express the cordial affection we feel for the gospel, that most inestimable of all blessings, by every possible exertion in the warfare, wherein our divine Saviour has engaged us, with sin, the world, and the powers of darkness. So, when God, in the last and great day which is approaching, shall shake not the earth only but the heavens, we shall receive a kingdom which cannot be moved.

A

SERMON

OCCASIONED BY THE DECEASE

OF

JOHN HOWARD, ESQ.

PREACHED MARCH 21st, 1790.

Acts x. 38.——*Who went about doing good*—

It is a sad providence that directs my attention to those words —words so descriptive of the character to which I mean to accommodate them, that the name of Howard scarce need be mentioned to inform you whom I intend. To raise a monument to his memory is not my object. It does not require it, nor am I equal to the service. The obligations however I owe to *his* friendship and *your* edification, will not allow me to be silent. His benevolent regards to this Christian society; his regular attendance with us for many years past, as opportunity permitted; the satisfaction he expressed in the word here preached; and the particular share I had in his affectionate esteem, are all considerations which will I hope secure me from the imputation of vanity, in thus taking notice of so public a character.

The words of our text were spoken by the apostle Peter to Cornelius, of our Lord Jesus Christ. *God anointed him with the Holy Ghost, and with power, so that he went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for God was with him.* The two particulars I mean to illustrate and improve are,

I. His business, which was *doing good*; and

II. The diligence with which he pursued it—*he went about* doing good.

I. His business. It was *doing good.*

He was a *Benefactor* to mankind. A title assumed by one of the Egyptian kings, how justly I will not enquire. But whatever good offices a Ptolemy Euergetes might perform, his character is not to be mentioned at the same time with that of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is indeed Jesus the Benefactor. Not to speak here of the grand object of his appearance in our world, the offering his life a sacrifice for sin: how benevolently was he employed during his pilgrimage on earth! *He went about doing good*—good, both to the *souls* and the *bodies* of men. To the latter indeed our text princi-

pally refers. And though it instances only one species of good he did, that of *healing them who were possessed of the devil*; yet the phrase itself comprehends all possible ways of being beneficial to mankind. And the instance here mentioned plainly intimates, as some have observed, that he who took such pains to rescue the bodies of men from the power and possession of the devil, would not suffer their souls to remain under his dominion. He *did good* then both to their *souls* and their *bodies*.

FIRST, To their *souls*.

This he did by his public preaching, and his private instructions. He set himself to oppose the passions of depraved nature, and the prejudices arising from the ignorance and superstition of the times. He laid the axe to the root of the tree, and resolutely combated the absurd and dangerous principles of the scribes and Pharisees, who sat in Moses's seat, and lorded it over the consciences of men. He shewed the fallacy of their reasonings, and the evil tendency of their doctrines. And knowing the secrets of their hearts, he warned men to beware of their hypocrisy, affirming that they were *blind leaders of the blind a*. And while he thus attacked the prevailing errors of the times, which had confirmed men in ignorance and sin, he failed not to give them just apprehensions of GOD, his *law*, the *soul*, the *way of life and salvation*, *religion*, and a *future state*.

The character of the blessed GOD he placed in its true light, by ascribing to him the perfections of wisdom, justice, holiness, goodness, and truth; and by drawing out the lively expressions thereof in his own pure and perfect example.

The divine *law* he rescued from those false glosses and absurd interpretations, which had been imposed upon it by wicked and designing men; giving its true and genuine sense, and explaining its spirituality, extent, and authority.

The *soul* he affirmed to be immortal: and whilst he asserted its dignity, importance, and amenableness at the divine tribunal, gave a striking picture of the sad state to which it is reduced by sin; laying open the ignorance, pride, passion, and

a Matt. xv. 14.

iniquity of the human heart, and insisting on the necessity of a moral change, or of the *new birth a.*

All haughty pretences to merit he treated with sovereign contempt, teaching men that HE alone was *the Mediator between God and them b*, that *none could come to God with acceptance but by him c*, and that *they only who believed on him, the Saviour of the world, should have life through him d.*

The nature of *personal religion* he explained, and the obligations of Christians to it he enforced by the noblest motives. The blessings of a peaceful conscience, and the pleasures resulting from a hope of the divine favour, he set in the most engaging light. And while he recommended the virtues of humility, faith, and benevolence, with their genuine fruits, he pointed to the blessed Spirit as the author of these heavenly gifts, and directed his followers to look for them as the effect of his influence.

To crown all, he gave the most pleasing and animated descriptions of the felicity and glory of heaven, and the strongest assurances of its certainty and everlasting duration.—Such was the doctrine our Saviour taught, ever accompanied with the clearest reasoning, the most forcible arguments, and the warmest persuasions.

It is also observable of his instructions, that they were so conducted as to the season, manner, and other circumstances of them, as best to attain the end he had always in view of *doing good.* He taught both publicly and privately, at home and abroad, in the temple and the synagogues, in the city and the desert. He took occasion from the common occurrences of life to engage the attention of men to the great truths of religion, and to fix a deep impression of their importance upon their hearts. He addressed himself to the different characters, passions, and conditions of his hearers. The ignorant he taught with gentleness and forbearance, pitying their prejudices, and condescending to their weaknesses. The distressed he comforted, like a compassionate physician, healing the broken-hearted, and pouring oil and wine into the wounds of the bleeding conscience. The proud and self-con-

a John iii. 3. *b* 1 Tim. ii. 5. *c* John xiv. 6. *d* John iii. 36.

fident opposer he reproved with seasonable freedom, and just severity. Nor would the peculiar affection he bare to his own disciples, suffer him to soothe their irregular passions, or palliate their criminal mistakes. As occasion was, he reprehended or he pitied them, he exhorted or he comforted them, he censured or he applauded them. And his instructions he clothed with such language, figures, and parables; and uttered them with such a voice and gesture, as were best adapted to convey them with clearness and energy to the mind and conscience.—Thus did our divine Saviour, in every possible way, serve the interests of the immortal souls of men. Which leads me to speak,

SECONDLY, Of his *doing good* to their *bodies*.

Their temporal interests, every species of which I include in this phrase, were an object he did not deem unworthy of his attention. As he was not himself a stranger to poverty and affliction, so neither was he insensible of the miseries of others. So far from it, that he is said to have *borne their griefs and carried their sorrows a*: and *he came not to be ministered to, but to minister b*.

How much he was concerned for the civil interests of his native country, appears from the tears he shed over Jerusalem, while he looked forward to the dreadful calamities that were coming upon it. The offices too of private friendship he performed with the greatest cheerfulness, as is evident from the provident care he took of his disciples, whom he considered as his family, and the affectionate farewel he gave them at last. And of the good he did to individuals of every rank and condition where he came, the instances are innumerable.

He was himself poor, and so had little of this world's good to distribute to the needy. Yet what he had he freely communicated to them; and the widow, the orphan, and the stranger all shared of his bounty. Having no other way to provide for a large multitude that followed him into the wilderness, and were almost spent with hunger, he miraculously multiplied a few small loaves and fishes, and so kindly supplied the cravings of animal nature *c*. The sick he healed.

a Isa. liii. 4. *b* Matt. xx. 28. *c* John vi. 5—14.

The cries of tender parents for their children, of masters for their servants, of the humane for their afflicted friends and neighbours, he heard and answered. He gave eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, and feet to the lame. The hungry he fed, and the naked he clothed. Little children received his benediction, and *the blessing of thousands that were ready to perish came upon him a.* By his presence, houses hung round with sorrow and mourning, were made cheerful and happy. The widow of Nain, through his tender compassion, had her only son restored to life, and given back to her embraces *b*; and Martha and Mary their beloved brother Lazarus *c.*

In short, every place he visited had some monument of gratitude to raise to his liberality. And his disciples long after, well remembered what he was used to say, with heartfelt pleasure and delight, *It is better to give than receive d.* The favourite maxim this by which he governed his life, and which he found means to practise amidst all the poverty and misery he endured.—Thus have we taken a general view of the good he did both to the *bodies* and *souls* of men.—And now let us see,

II. With what attention and diligence he performed this the great business of his life.—*He went about* doing good.

Such was his constant, unwearied, and most delightful employment. He considered it as his proper work, just as men do the following their several trades and occupations of life. —So he calls it *his Father's business. Wot ye not that I was about my Father's business e?*—And *the work which was given him to do f.* To do the will of God was *his meat and drink g*; as natural to him, as it is to men in common to gratify their senses. And that it was thus his object will appear, if you consider these three things, manifestly included in the expression of *going about* to do good,—the *wide extent* of his labours—the *pains* which of necessity must attend his work—and his *perseverance* therein.

a Job xxix. 13. *b* Luke vii. 11—17. *c* John xi. 1—46.
d Acts xx. 35. *e* Luke ii. 49. *f* John xvii. 4.
g John iv. 34.

FIRST, As to the *wide extent* of his labours.

He did not move in a narrow sphere. His aim of doing good was not confined to his own proper family, to his neighbourhood, to the town where he lived, or to the villages round about it, no nor to Judea itself. It was not confined to his immediate disciples, or to his own party, as they were perhaps called; no nor to the Jews themselves. He did good to all sorts of men, high and low, rich and poor, young and old, persons of every description. *He went about* doing good. He did not stay at home, and receive all that came to him, as Paul was obliged to do at Rome, in his own hired house. But he went abroad, went wheresoever he was sent for, or where there was any prospect of doing good. Sometimes he is seen in the city, and sometimes in the wilderness; sometimes in the towns and villages, and sometimes in the fields and by the way-side: now in Galilee, then in Judea.

SECONDLY, The *pains and fatigues* too attending his work were very great.

His constitution was probably as tender, and as susceptible of languor and weariness as that of the most delicate. This however was no temptation to him to sloth and indulgence. Urged by the vehement desire of doing good, he is forgetful of himself, and indifferent to those precautions which would be generally thought prudent. Hunger, thirst, and cold, he willingly suffers to accomplish his designs. Hazardous and fatiguing journeys he takes to compass the ends of his ministry. Sometimes we see him sitting on the side of a well, and asking a little water to quench his thirst *a*. And again, entering a village where the inhospitable inhabitants refuse him any entertainment. *The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests: but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head b*, yet none of these things discourage him.

Nor does his love of solitude, which must have been peculiarly grateful to him who had in himself such sources of divine entertainment, divert him from his grand object. If he may but do good he is content to live in a crowd. Nor is he discouraged by the opposition he meets with. Nothing is so

a John iv. 6, 7. *b* Matt, viii. 20.

great a trial to a good man, as to be traduced for a designing hypocrite, and represented as aiming at popularity, or something worse. So our Lord was treated. Yet this cruel treatment does not provoke him to desist from his attempts to do good; no nor the base ingratitude of many who received favours at his indulgent hands.—Once more,

THIRDLY, The phrase intimates his *constancy and perseverance* in this his delightful employment.

He did not in one or two instances only do good. He did not upon a few occasions only exert himself for the good of his family, his neighbourhood, his friends, or his country. It was not in his early days only that he was thus employed, or when incited to duty by some fair opportunity that offered. To do good was the business of his whole life. At twelve years of age he was doing good in the temple *a*, and the very last day of his life he was employed in the same work. His zeal never abated, nor did his business suffer any the least intermission. *I have finished the work*, says he, when he came to die, *which thou gavest me to do b*.

Thus have you the outlines of our Saviour's most perfect and amiable character—a character which never was or can be equalled. *He went about doing good*, and acquitted himself with entire satisfaction to his divine Father, and the requisitions of his holy law.

Let us now consider the *instruction* which this pleasing subject affords.

FIRST, This view of our Saviour's character should excite in our breasts the warmest *love* to him, and the firmest *confidence* in him.

Can we have so fair a pattern before our eyes without being enamoured with it? especially when we reflect that to this zeal and diligence of his we owe our hope of everlasting life. It was not only in obedience to his Father's commands, but to gratify his own ardent desires for our welfare, as well as that of his immediate disciples, that he thus went about doing good. From his toils and labours we derive blessings of infinite value. He has by these means laid open to our view the immeasurable

a Luke ii. 46. *b* John xvii. 4.

grace and compassion of his heart; given us the most striking idea of the divine character; provided effectually for our forgiveness, acceptance, and salvation; and set us an example the most engaging—the most animating. Behold the Son of God thus *going about doing good*, thus providing for the happiness of myriads of rational creatures, and securing to them joys the most refined and that know no end. And then say, Whether he is not worthy of our highest love and most cheerful obedience.—Nor can there remain the least ground to suspect either his *ability*, or his *willingness*, to *save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him a*; after his having given such proofs of the perfection of his character, and the benevolence of his heart.

SECONDLY, In this mirror of our Saviour's example we have a clear and humbling view of our own defects. His pattern justly upbraids the sin and folly of all. *He went about doing good.*

But ah! how many are there, on the contrary, who go about doing evil? like their father the devil, *who, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour b.*—Doing evil to God, trampling under foot his righteous law, and casting contempt upon the gracious proposals of his gospel. Doing evil to their fellow-creatures, to their reputation, substance, and persons. And doing evil to themselves, laying violent hands on their immortal souls, *making a mock at sin c*, and *casting about fire-brands, arrows, and death, saying they are in sport d.*—And not only do evil, but *go about* to do evil; consider it their business, *make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof e*; and *not only do these things*, but, as the apostle expresses it, *have pleasure in those that do them f.* How deplorable these characters!

Others there are who think it enough if they abstain from gross sins, and doing no one any harm, take it for granted they may be excused doing any good. But such men, while sheltering themselves under the fond notion of innocence, act in direct opposition to their own reason; since the same law

a Heb. vii. 25. *b* 1 Pet. v. 8. *c* Prov. xiv. 9.
d Prov. xxvi. 18, 19. *e* Rom. xiii. 14. *f* Rom. i. 32.

that requires them to abstain from vice, requires them also to do good. To men of this character I would say,—Behold, I beseech you, in the mirror of the Saviour's life, your own lamentable defects; and so be convinced of the necessity, on the one hand, of that provision he has made for the pardon and acceptance of the penitent sinner; and on the other, of new views, dispositions, and affections to constitute you his disciples, and engage you to the imitation of his example.

Others indeed are sensible, in a degree at least, of their obligations not only to preserve sober characters, but also to do good: yet, alas! while faintly attempting it, they confidently build their hopes on their supposed merit. They go about, or rather seem to go about, doing good, and therefore think they have a claim to the rewards of heaven, on the ground of strict equity. But let such men compare their works with those of Christ, and they will see such deficiencies in them, as must, unless extravagant stupidity prevent, strike them dumb in the presence of a Being who is omniscient and all-perfect.—Again,

Another deception, no less fatal, is that of those who, wholly taken up with speculations in religion, and furiously zealous in their contention for the faith; are perfectly indifferent to the great business of imitating the example of Christ. But what evidence does that man give of the genuineness of his faith, who acts as if he thought his zeal was to excuse him from offices of love and obedience; and as if, because he served the king in his wars, as some one expresses it, he is to be exempted from taxes? A due consideration of the life of Christ, every where proposed for our imitation, would make such persons ashamed of their pretensions to religion.—Once more,

While we thus behold our divine Master ever employed in doing good, the very best of us stand reproved for our many failures in duty. Alas! how little good have we done! how little for the glory of God! the honour of Christ! and the real welfare of our fellow-creatures! Let us therefore be deeply humbled at the feet of divine mercy, look by faith to the cross of Christ, and shed penitential tears there for our ingratitude and disingenuity. And let us,

THIRDLY, Be persuaded to the imitation of his most excellent example.

To do good is the noblest employment we can be engaged in: nor is there a Christian living who has it not in his power to do good. If then we have abilities, though but in the smallest degree, for instructing others, let us cheerfully use them to that end. *Let him that hath the gift of teaching, wait on teaching; or of exhorting, on exhortation a.* Be our stations in life what they may, whether public or private, let us cherish in our bosoms the amiable graces of humility, meekness, contentment, and benevolence; and by the genuine expressions of those graces in our lives allure others to the imitation of our example, and so do them good. Particularly by acts of charity, if blessed with wealth, let us diffuse happiness among the poor, and animate those of the same rank with ourselves to the like kind offices. Let us feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the sick, and take under our patronage the oppressed and the friendless, the widow and the orphan. And to our endeavours for the good of others, let us add our fervent prayers to God for his blessing. Thus let us become the friends and benefactors of mankind.

To animate us to our duty, let it be remembered, that while we are doing good, we are imitating the example of the blessed God. *He is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works b.* O how various, how numerous, how prodigious are the expressions of his bounty! And how great must the honour be to resemble him, the best of all beings! *Be ye therefore followers of God, brethren, as dear children c.*

By doing good we imitate the example of Christ. And when to the dignity of his character, we add the obligations we owe to his friendship in dying for us, how powerful, how irresistible is the motive to do as he did! O think, Christian, on the one hand, of the immense value of your soul, the miseries to which your guilt had exposed you, and the glory to which you stand entitled in heaven; and think, on the other, of the painful services your divine Saviour performed, and the bitter sufferings he endured, to redeem you from death and

a Rom. xii. 7, 8. *b* Psal. cxlv. 9. *c* Eph. v. 1.

hell, and to make you the heir of immortal bliss: think of all this, and then say, Whether you are not bound by every possible obligation to imitate the example of such a Friend?

There is also the highest pleasure, to a renewed mind, in this God-like employment of doing good. Is he a happy man whose only object is, to guard against temporal evils and to gratify his animal appetites? O! no. Rightly instructed in our relation to God and one another, the noblest sensations we can possibly feel, are those which arise from a persuasion of his favour, and the recollection of having contributed to the happiness of our fellow-creatures. How earnestly did the apostle exhort the Ephesians to remember the words of Christ! *how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive a.*

Let me add the animating consideration of the infinitely glorious rewards of a future state. Yes, Christian, the blessed Jesus, who himself went about doing good, will not fail, on the great day of account, to acknowledge your services performed in obedience to his commands, and from a grateful sense of your obligations to his grace. With what unutterable joy will you hear him say, in the presence of angels and men! *I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me b. Well done, good and faithful servant! enter thou into the joy of thy Lord c.*

But there is one further consideration to animate us to our duty, and that is, the example of men eminent for their benevolence and piety. Such an example I have now to hold up to your view. A pattern which is not, indeed, to be copied, in many particulars of it, as few have ability and opportunity for the exertions of so distinguished a character. The consideration of it may, however, have a happy effect to engage us, in our little circles, to put out all our strength in the service of God and our fellow-creatures.

Permit me then to give you some general account of this extraordinary man, and then relate a few historical facts con-

a Acts xx. 35. *b* Matth. xxv. 35—39. *c* Matth. xxv. 21.

cerning him, which will establish what has been said of his character, and make impressions on our minds suited to the present occasion.

I shall not take up your time with the particulars of his birth, education, and fortune. The advantages of this kind with which Providence indulged him, and of which he was truly sensible, were of trifling consideration, when brought into view with those personal endowments, natural and religious, by which he was distinguished from most other characters.

He possessed a clear understanding and a sound judgment, which were enriched and improved by a variety of useful knowledge. And as he had a taste for polite literature, so he was well versed in most of the modern languages, which he took no small pains to acquire, that he might be the better enabled to carry his benevolent purposes into effect. He had a just idea of the civil and religious rights of mankind, accompanied with a true sense of the worth, importance, and dignity of man as a reasonable, social, and immortal creature. And as no man had a more extensive knowledge of the world than he, having conversed with personages of the first rank in life, and with those in the meanest stations; with characters eminent for virtue and piety, and the most abandoned and wretched; so no man was more fully persuaded than he of the universal depravity of human nature. With the discernment both of a philosopher and a Christian he entered into the principles, maxims, and views of men of all ranks and conditions of life; and knew how to apply the knowledge he thus acquired to the most important purposes.

His moral endowments were perhaps more extraordinary than those just mentioned. Here he shone with distinguished lustre. The two virtues of *fortitude* and *humanity* were the prominent features in his countenance. Nor could his modesty conceal them from the public eye, no not from the view of all Europe. They were interwoven with his nature, and always acted in unison with each other.

Such was the *firmness of his mind* that no danger could deter him from his duty—not the painful fatigues of long and hazardous journies—not the perils of seas infested with merci-

less barbarians—not the loathsome infection of dungeons—not the dread of assassination by the hands of miscreants, who draw their gains from the vitals of those committed to their custody—nor the apprehension of the plague in a ship with a foul bill, and in the confinement of a lazaretto—no danger, however formidable, could shake his resolution. "Having made up his mind to his duty," as he told me when expressing my apprehensions for his safety, "he thrusted all consequences from his view, and was resolved to follow wherever Providence led." And in a letter I received from him, when just embarking on a dangerous ocean, with the prospect before him of performing a forty-two days quarantine, he thus expresses himself, *I bless God, my calm spirits and steady resolution have not yet forsaken me.*

He was superior too to the frowns and the contempt of the envious and the avaricious, who represented him as petulantly officious, or extravagantly insane. Disappointments he *did* meet with, and obstructions *were* thrown in the way of some of his benevolent plans. But none of these things moved him. And more than one instance I might mention of his asserting the cause of the oppressed, in the face of a kind of opposition which would make most men tremble.—Nor on the other hand, could the siren-song of ease, indulgence, and pleasure, prevail on him when on the career of duty and danger, in the least to relax his painful exertions.

"Firm to the mast with chains himself he bound,
"Nor trusted virtue to th' enchanting sound."

With this Roman fortitude was united uncommon *humanity*. He felt for the miseries of mankind in general. He felt for the miseries of the oppressed. Yea, he felt for the miseries of the guilty, for he well remembered that we are all guilty before God. Their distresses existed not in his imagination only, they were realized to his eye, his ear, his touch. As the poet expresses it, when speaking of him,

"He quitted bliss that rural scenes bestow,
"To seek a nobler amidst scenes of woe,

" To traverse seas, range kingdoms, and bring home
" Not the proud monuments of Greece or Rome,
" But knowledge such as only dungeons teach,
" And only sympathy like his could reach."

The number of prisons he visited, at the hazard of his health and life, it would be difficult to collect. Nor did he stop at the iron-gate of the most gloomy dungeon. He entered those dreary mansions of silence and darkness, and, in some instances, of cruel oppression; poured tears of commiseration on the wretched inhabitant; and with his own hand ministered assistance, while his heart was meditating plans of more general and effectual relief. *The impressions*, says he, *which these scenes of misery made on my mind, no length of time can efface.* It may therefore easily be imagined that, with a sensibility peculiar to himself, he affixed that expressive motto to his book,

" Ah! little think the gay———
" Whom pleasure, power, and affluence surround,
" How many pine in want and dungeon-glooms;
" Shut from the common air." THOMSON.

Here I might paint, but I shall rather leave it to you to imagine, the ecstatic joy which many groaning under oppression felt, at starting into life and happiness, through the interposition of this their generous patron; and the gratitude too, which even those who justly suffered imprisonment felt, for the alleviation of their miseries by his kind offices.

His *disinterestedness* also in these exertions for the good of mankind, is deserving of our particular notice. For besides the consideration of the fatigues he endured, the dangers to which he exposed his person, and the expence of various kinds he incurred, he well knew the reports he made to the public would afford disgust rather than entertainment, and so be read and regarded by few. He writ therefore not for the amusement of the curious, and could expect no applause from the unfeeling. Indeed his object was the information of the legislature, of whom he sought, and from whom, to his great satisfaction, he obtained the redress of many evils he complained of. *As*

nothing, says he, *but a consciousness of duty could have enabled me to go through all the disagreeable scenes which lay in my way, so I had the happiness of being placed out of the reach of other incitements.*

There is one more trait in his character which must not be overlooked, and that is his *temperance*. Such a mastery he obtained over himself that a little food, and that chiefly of the vegetable kind, satisfied the demands of nature; and with one night's rest out of three he could, for a long course of time, pursue his journies. No consideration could prevail on him to partake of the luxuries of the most elegant table, or to allow himself more rest than was absolutely necessary. Nor yet was he influenced, in this kind of discipline he observed, by cynical austerity. He found this mode of living most agreeable to his constitution, and best qualified him for those active exertions which were the pleasure of his life.

Such were the moral endowments of this extraordinary man —such his *fortitude*, his *humanity*, his *disinterestedness*, and *temperance*.—I go on now to speak of his religious character.

He was a firm believer of divine revelation. Nor was he ashamed of those truths he heard stated, explained, and enforced in this place. He had made up his mind, as he said, upon his religious sentiments, and was not to be moved from his stedfastness by novel opinions obtruded on the world. Nor did he content himself with a bare profession of these divine truths. He entered into the spirit of the gospel, felt its power, and tasted its sweetness. You know, my friends, with what seriousness and devotion he attended, for a long course of years, on the worship of God among us. It would be scarce decent for me to repeat the affectionate things he says, in a letter writ me from a remote part of the world, respecting the satisfaction and pleasure he had felt in the religious exercises of this place *a*. I shall however be excused, if I just observe, that his hours of religious retirement, whether on land or at sea, were employed in reviewing the notes he had taken of sermons delivered here. And *these*, adds he, *are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. Oh, Sir, how many sabbaths*

a For a copy of this Letter, see p. 459, at the end of these Sermons.

have I ardently longed to spend in Wild-street!—God in Christ is my rock, the portion of my soul.

His candour, as might naturally be expected in a man of his exemplary piety, was great. As he steadily adhered to his religious principles, so he abhorred bigotry. Having met with difficulties in his enquiries after truth, he knew how to make allowance for those who met with the same.

His acts of charity to the poor were numerous. For though he was not ostentatious, yet many of them could not be concealed. Providence blessed him with affluence; but all who knew him, know that nothing was more opposite to his disposition than the heaping up wealth. His treasure was laid up in heaven. His neighbourhood in Bedfordshire will bear witness to his generosity; and many a poor family there will, I doubt not, feel deeply for the loss of so kind a friend. Nor were his charities confined to the circle of his own mansion. *He went about*, like his divine Master, *doing good*. Compassion excited, prudence guided, and obligingness accompanied his benefactions. He well remembered what the benevolent Jesus was used to say when on earth, *It is more blessed to give than to receive*. Few who sought his assistance were refused, and many obtained it without seeking it. The advancement of the interests of truth and religion, was an object in his view most important. To the erecting of many a place of worship did he liberally contribute. And with what cheerfulness he assisted in the building this house you need not be told. *He accounted it an honour*, he said, *to join his name with yours*.

Good men of every denomination he affectionately loved. And while with a manly firmness he asserted and maintained his own religious sentiments, agreeably to the sense he felt of their importance; he was a good deal hurt at every approach, in his apprehension, towards a little, narrow, contracted spirit in matters of religion. Yet he was a *Dissenter* from the Established Church on principle. Nor was he ashamed to have it known to all the world that this was his profession. He well understood the grounds of his dissent, nor could he on any consideration think it his duty to take the sacramental test as a qualification, either for enjoying any place of honour and

emolument, or serving any burdensome office in the state. Called upon, however, to the latter, he did not avail himself of this just excuse for declining the service; but resolutely undertook it, at the hazard of incurring enormous pains and penalties, from which nothing but a bill of indemnity could secure him.

Such was the character of this excellent man. *He went about doing good.* The life of Christ was the original, his the copy. How nearly the latter resembled the former you will judge from what has been said. Nor am I afraid you will charge the account given of him with exaggeration. His character was a very extraordinary one. It was, however, not without its imperfections: nor should I do him justice were I to omit adding that he was himself deeply sensible of those imperfections.

It remains that I mention a few historical facts, which will serve to throw a further light upon the character we have drawn, and confirm the truth of what hath been said.

In the year 1773 he was called upon to serve the office of Sheriff for the county of Bedford. The prisons, of course, falling under his inspection and management, he became acquainted with such disorders and abuses, as failed not to excite his compassionate concern. He considered that prisons, houses of correction excepted, were not meant for punishment but confinement. No man is in the eye of the law guilty, till legally tried and convicted. He therefore rightly concluded that to subject a person in this state to any inconvenience, more than the necessary one of confinement, is unjust; and to suffer him, when acquitted, to be loaded with exorbitant fees, is cruel oppression.

The utmost pains therefore he immediately took to effect a reform in the gaols under his own custody. This naturally led to the idea, that what had happened in his own county, might have happened also in other counties. He therefore resolved to visit the prisons of neighbouring shires. This he did, and his fears being realized by the miserable scenes his eyes beheld, he extended his progress further, and visited the whole kingdom. The information thus obtained, and which

was committed accurately to writing, he immediately applied to the object he had in view.

In the year 1774 he was examined upon this subject before the House of Commons, when he had the honour of their thanks. And soon after a Bill was brought in "for the Relief of prisoners who should be acquitted—respecting their fees;" and another Bill "for preserving the health of prisoners, and preventing the gaol-distemper." These two Acts which passed that Session, he had printed in a different character, and sent them to the keeper of every county-gaol in England. *By those Acts*, as he observes, *the tear was wiped from many an eye; and the legislature had for them the blessings of many that were ready to perish.* Thus had a HOWARD the honour of pouring consolation into the afflicted breast; and through him it might be said, *God looked down from the height of his sanctuary, to hear the groaning of the prisoner, to loose those that were appointed to death a.*

His views, upon this success, were quickly enlarged. He resolved to visit the prisons in foreign countries, not only to obtain relief for the oppressed, and a mitigation of miseries to the distressed wherever he found them; but to procure such new information, as might be necessary to forward the reforms he had in contemplation at home. His visits were repeated, and scarce a kingdom was there in Europe which he did not traverse.

He then extended his views still further, and resolved to collect the rules, orders, and drafts of the principal Lazarettos in Europe, with the medical treatment of patients in the plague; in hopes by these means to set on foot such regulations, and bring forward such measures as, with the blessing of God, might prevent the future return of that calamity to this country. So he travelled into Turkey, and visited himself one, if not more, who was actually in that dreadful disorder, the distant apprehension of which has made many a countenance turn pale.

To give you only a general account of his well-laid plans,

a Psal. cii. 18, 19.

for alleviating the miseries of the poor, for stopping the progress of vice, for promoting industry and virtue, and for preventing the importation and spread of infectious diseases, would carry me too far. I must therefore only add, that success has already, in a degree, attended his endeavours. And it is to be hoped, that such a superstructure will, in time, be raised on the foundation he has laid, as will be of the greatest utility to this country; and which, should he have access to the knowledge of it in the world above, would, I am persuaded, add to the joy his benevolent heart there feels.

We have hinted before at the painful fatigues he endured, the great expence he incurred, and the imminent dangers to which he exposed himself in thus *going about to do good:* and on this subject I meant further to enlarge, but must deny myself this satisfaction, lest I should trespass on your patience.

The attention which was paid to him by the principal personages in Europe, and which he was so far from courting, that, in some instances, he absolutely declined it; I say, this extraordinary attention of theirs, with the peculiar circumstances that accompanied it, shews in what high estimation his character stood with the public. Indeed, his modesty must not be passed over without particular notice. His reply to one of the principal officers of state in a great kingdom, upon being told that, however he would not suffer a statue to be erected to him in his own country, a statue would in the prisons of that; I say, his reply was memorable, and marks the character of the man. *I have no objection,* said he, *to its being erected where it shall be invisible.* And in a letter he sent me from Turkey, speaking of this *hasty measure,* as he calls it, *and his wish that it might be stopped,* he adds, *Alas! our best performances have such a mixture of folly and sin, that praise is vanity and presumption, and pain to a thinking mind.*

He set out on his last journey the beginning of July, 1789. It was to have been of great extent, and to have taken up the compass of about three years. I expostulated largely with him

at parting, on the mistake of suffering himself, through an earnest desire of doing good, to be precipitated beyond the clear line of duty, which might possibly be sometimes the case. He seemed to apprehend he should scarce see this country again, and when last in this place, said to a friend near him, *Well! we shall not perhaps meet one another again till we meet in heaven.*

What we feared Providence has permitted. HOWARD is no more! He died at Cherson *a*, January the 20th, of a malignant fever, which he caught by humanely visiting a person in that disorder; to whom he administered the usual medicine, but without effect. The same medicine he took himself, which proving too powerful for his constitution, the fever carried him off in ten days. He had the assistance of several physicians; and great attention was paid him by Prince Potemkin, who not only sent him his own physician, but visited him himself *b*.

Thus fell this great and good man a sacrifice to humanity. The sad news has touched the hearts of thousands. His country weeps. Who feels not on this mournful occasion? It is no weakness to feel—to feel, when friendship and benevolence receive so great a shock from the merciless hand of death.

Submission, however, is our duty. May surviving relatives patiently acquiesce in so very trying a providence! And let us all endeavour to compose our minds to this temper, by turning our attention from the loss *we* sustain to the immense gain *he* has acquired. *Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord: they rest from their labours, and their works follow them c.* Yes, he hath ceased from his labours, and is now in the perfect en-

a A settlement of the Empress of Russia, toward the northern extremity of the Euxine or Black Sea, not far from Oczakow.

b A few days after the publication of the former edition of this Sermon, the person who attended Mr. HOWARD on his journey, and in whose arms he expired, arrived from Cherson. From him, among other particulars, I learn that he met death with submission, composure, and fortitude; and that he retained his senses to the last, expressing the pleasing satisfaction he felt in the prospect of 'going home to his Father and his God.'

c Rev. xiv. 13.

joyment of that freedom, health, and happiness he so benevolently wished all mankind to possess:

—— his weary soul he bathes
In seas of heavenly rest,
And not a wave of trouble rolls
Across his peaceful breast.

Glory too is his reward. While the angel of mercy wiped the falling tear from his eye, God the Judge of all, placed a crown of righteousness on his head. So, with a satisfaction unhurt by the pain he had often felt from the applause of men, he received the plaudit of his divine Master. *Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord* a. The sentence was heard by the heavenly choir, who instantly, with one voice, echoed back their loud *Amen*.

a Matth. xxv. 23.

THE MORTALITY OF MINISTERS CONTRASTED WITH THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF CHRIST:

IN

A SERMON,

ON THE DEATH OF THE

REV. CALEB EVANS, D.D.

Who departed this Life, August 9th, 1791, in the 54th Year of his Age.

PREACHED

AT BROADMEAD, BRISTOL, AUGUST 21st.

THE MORTALITY OF MINISTERS CONTRASTED WITH THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF CHRIST.

PAINFUL as my feelings are upon this sad occasion, and unequal as I am on many accounts to this solemn service, I cannot however decline the duty to which you, my friends, have called me. The great respect in which I hold the memory of my dear departed brother, and my cordial regards to his afflicted widow and family, and to this mournful congregation, oblige me to a ready compliance with your request. We all need support under so trying a providence; nor is there a consideration better adapted, with the blessing of God, to afford it, than that addressed to the Hebrew Christians in a similar situation,

HEB. XIII. 8.—*Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*

VICISSITUDE is written in striking characters on all the affairs of the present life. Every object our eyes behold, every relation among mankind, and every enjoyment, whether animal, intellectual, or religious, is subject to fluctuation and change. But there are two concerns of this description, which have been the occasions of great affliction to pious men, and which the apostle seems to have had in his eye when he spake the language of our text: the one, the mortality of Christian ministers; and the other, the instability of many professors of religion. Of the former he speaks in the verse preceding the text, and to the latter he refers in the words immediately following it.

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, con-

sidering the end of their conversation. JESUS CHRIST THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER. *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines.*

This sacred aphorism, pronounced thus solemnly by the lips of an inspired apostle, and in the connection just stated, was most happily adapted to console the Hebrew-Christians, amidst the pungent grief they felt for the decease of their affectionate ministers; and to operate as a caveat against that versatility and desultoriness in matters of religion, which through the influence of Jewish teachers and other seducers prevailed much at that time. And the words may and ought to be thus applied on all similar occasions. Let us therefore consider—the import of this striking proposition in the text; —the conclusions which naturally flow from it;—and the practical uses to which it is to be applied.

FIRST, As to the import of the words.

The proposition in our text is couched in plain and easy terms, and carries on the face of it the greatest imaginable dignity and importance. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.*

To interpret Jesus Christ here of the doctrine of Christ, is taking a liberty with the sacred text, for which I can see no necessity, and which I think sound criticism will not justify. The first idea that would occur to a plain man on reading the words is, that Jesus Christ *himself* is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. This sense of the passage forms a much more natural antithesis to the former verse than the other. For surely it is a more natural and striking sentiment, that "ministers are mortal, but Christ is always the same;" than that "ministers are dying men, but truth is always truth." Besides, what is here affirmed of Christ is no other than is asserted in many other passages of Scripture. And the doctrine of his eternity and unchangeableness has a peculiar suitableness in it to console the mind under the particular kind of affliction referred to. I shall therefore understand the words of Christ himself, as appears to me to have been the meaning of the inspired writer.

But it will be asked, Who is Jesus Christ? I answer, The

same of whom the Hebrews had often heard, who some years before appeared in the character of a prophet, suffered death without the gates of Jerusalem, rose from the dead on the third day, and then passed up into heaven. Jesus Christ, *the Son of the living God, his only begotten Son, the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person a:* every where spoken of as distinguished from the Father, and yet possessing one common divine nature with him. Now of him it is asserted in the text, that he is eternal and immutable.

He is eternal. Jesus Christ is *yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.* Terms which, when taken together, very naturally denote continued existence. For if no more is intended by them, and by that other similar phrase, *who is, and was, and is to come,* than what the words literally express, the like may be affirmed of every man, yea of children in the earliest stage of life. But it is plain the apostle meant to say that of him, which should distinguish him in point of excellence and glory from all others. It is as if he had said, "There was no point of duration in which he did not exist, and none in which he will cease to exist." And I am the more inclined to think that this was his meaning, as the same sublime sentiment is expressed in many other passages, and in a variety of the most striking language. 'He was before Abraham, before the world began, before any thing was made, in the beginning. His goings forth were from everlasting. And he will ever continue to exist, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, the same who is, was, and is to come *b.*'—But this is not true of his human nature. That had a beginning. 'He was made flesh. As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also took part of the same. He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham *c.*' Eternity therefore is to be attributed to his superior nature only. He, the Son of God, is eternal. He exists yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

a Matt. xvi. 16.—John i. 14.—Heb. i. 3.
b John viii. 58. xvii. 5. i. 1, 3.—Mic. v. 2.—Rev. i. 8.
c John i. 14.—Heb. ii. 14, 16.

He is also immutable. Jesus Christ *the same* yesterday, to-day, and for ever. To this purpose his unchangeableness is opposed, in the first chapter of this epistle, to the changeableness of the heaven, the earth, and all created things. 'Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment. And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail *a*.'—But immutability is not, cannot be, attributed to him as a man. He underwent the like changes with others, was an infant, a youth, and a man of mature age. He was subject to sickness, pain, and trouble; and actually suffered death. Immutability therefore, in like manner as eternity, is only to be understood of his superior nature.

Now from the eternity and immutability of Christ, thus clearly expressed and authoritatively asserted, there follow,

SECONDLY, Conclusions most certain, necessary, and important. As,

1. His true and proper divinity.

How a mere creature should be eternal and unchangeable is not conceivable. 'The Word, who was in the beginning, and continues for ever the same, is God.' And therefore he is to be divinely honoured and revered. 'Let all the angels of God worship him. Let all men honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Let them with Thomas devoutly acknowledge him God, and with Paul proclaim him God over all blessed for ever. Let every creature in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, ascribe blessing, and honour, and glory, and power unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever *b*.' Being thus eternal and immutable, and of consequence God, he is to be implicitly believed and confided in; to be loved with a most ardent and supreme love; and to be obeyed in all things with the most perfect cordiality.—But he who is the same yesterday, to-day, and

a Ver. 10—12.

b John i. 1.—Heb. i. 6.—John v. 23. xx. 28.—Rom. ix. 5.—Rev. v. 13.

for ever, is Jesus Christ: for the terms of the proposition are convertible. From whence it follows,

2. That the deity united itself to humanity.

This fact, which is a consequence from the truth asserted in the text, is elsewhere reported in terms the most clear, direct, and positive. 'The Word who was in the beginning, who was God, by whom all things were made, and without whom was not any thing made that was made; was made flesh and dwelt among us. Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God; made himself of no reputation, took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross *a*.'

What amazing condescension, what unexampled philanthropy was this! Can we think of it, my brethren, without being lost in wonder, love, and joy? What is man, O Lord, that thou art thus mindful of him, and the son of man that thou thus visitest him! And how great are the obligations we are hereby laid under to his goodness! The wealth of an archangel could not pay the debt. The debt can never never be discharged. To what immense dignity is our nature exalted by its union with deity!—Union with deity! An idea so pleasing, so interesting, so marvellous as this, imagination in its utmost stretch could not present to the human mind. Think of this, O man, and be insensible if thou canst to thine own importance. It was the Shechinah that was the glory of the tabernacle and temple, and it is the Son of God's shechinizing in human flesh that is the glory of man. How highly favoured are we above all other creatures of God! Angels look up to us with respect, felicitate us on our honour, and bid us venerate ourselves. Yes truly, we are great, we are noble, we are god-like creatures!

And yet this view of ourselves hath no tendency to excite vain-glory. On the contrary, amidst these contemplations, all flattering ideas of our own personal and independent merit, to which we are prone in a rapture of self-love to pay idolatrous

a John i. 1, 3, 14.—Phil. ii. 6—8.

respect, all such ideas, I say, vanish into oblivion. Seeing at once the two extremes of human frailty and divine immutability united in our nature, we shrink to nothing under a conscious sense of our littleness, and at the same time aspire to every thing that is great under a full persuasion of our importance.

And surely no motive so noble, so august as this, could be proposed to the human heart, to dispose and animate it to the duties of virtue and piety. If God will indeed thus dwell with men, if he will unite our nature to his own, with what gratitude should we dedicate ourselves to his service! with what elevation of mind aspire to his moral likeness! and with what ardent desire look forward to the everlasting fruition of him in heaven! And our nature being thus ennobled, what generous sentiments should we cherish in our breasts towards each other! and how cheerfully should we exert our powers to promote the interests of all our brethren of mankind!

3. The eternity and immutability of Christ reflect a wonderful lustre on his mediation, and render him perfectly capable of fulfilling the various and important duties of it.

A Prophet of whom it may be asserted, that he is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, is surely to be depended upon in all he says. Who would not wish to sit at the feet of such an instructor? His judgment is infallible, and his sentence upon every matter decisive. Neither Moses, Daniel, nor Paul, who excelled in piety, wisdom, and eloquence, were always the same. They perceived their ignorance, felt their weakness, and lamented their unworthiness. Their light however glorious was borrowed, their powers however extraordinary were held in absolute dependence on the will of their Master, and by the grace of God they readily acknowledged they were what they were. But Jesus Christ, to whom the perfections of deity are attributed in our text, hath every qualification requisite to a prophet inherent in himself, and subject to no control from without. He possesses a conscious independence which gives dignity, stability, and effect to his instructions and decrees.

Jesus, the Son of God, is the High-priest of our profession. And being *a priest after the order of Melchizedeck, without*

beginning of days or end of life, he hath the qualifications of a priest in their highest perfection, and exercises them after such a manner as cannot fail of securing the object to be attained: so that it may be said of him, *his is an unchangeable priesthood a.* How pleasingly venerable does *his* countenance appear, who is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, while arraying himself in the priestly garments of humanity! We stand and gaze at him with wonder, with the mitre on his head, the breastplate on his bosom, and the censer in his hand; and with joy we hear the golden bells around the hem of his garment, reminding us of the business wherein he is employed. We see him offering the sacrifice without, and then passing within the vail, and sprinkling the blood before the mercy-seat: and while our eyes are fixed on him, thus officiating in all the glories of his superior nature, we join an infinite number of his faithful people, assembled around the altar of burnt-offering, in shouts of harmonious joy and praise—*The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedeck b.*

It is, my brethren, his eternity and immutability, with the other perfections of deity he possesses, that gives value to the sacrifice he offered on the cross, and insures success to his consequent intercession in heaven. Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Hear the great multitude around the throne of God above, whom no man can number, ascribing salvation to him that sitteth upon the throne and to the Lamb; and be assured beyond a doubt, that our divine Saviour is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them. The claims of justice are satisfied, the holy law of God is magnified, the basis of his moral government, which the powers of darkness had in vain attempted to shake, is established, an indelible mark of infamy is stamped on sin, and the equity of the divine administration secures to the penitent sinner all that immense good, which mercy was ever inclined to bestow. *Grace now reigns through righteousness unto eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord. God hath thus declared*

a Heb. vi. 20, vii. 3, 24, *b* Psal. cx. 4,

his righteousness for the remission of sin; and is just while he justifies him who believeth in Jesus a.

View him further in the character of a king, for such the man Christ Jesus is, and say what lustre this radiant jewel in his crown casts on his person, the throne whereon he sits, and all the acts of his mild and equitable government. The Son of God, whom the Father hath anointed king, and set on his holy hill of Sion, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; as wise, as just, as benign and propitious to his loyal subjects; as attentive to their interests throughout his unbounded empire, as able to restrain and conquer his and their enemies, as he ever was. And when his mediatorial kingdom shall determine, having subdued all things to him, he will himself remain immutable and eternal. Once more;

4. This affirmation concerning Christ in our text gives stability to the gospel, and the glorious hopes and promises it affords.

The scheme of salvation, in all the infinitely diversified parts of it, must necessarily be carried into effect. Not one link of the golden chain can ever be broken. The love in which it originated is the same. The wisdom which devised it is the same. The power that undertook the accomplishment of it is the same. Christ, who is at the head of this dispensation of grace, hath a comprehensive view of every thing relative to it; and hath provided for every possible contingent circumstance that may arise. *In him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge b.* His piercing eye pervades the universe. The sighs of the most obscure saint, and the deep-laid machinations of the prince of darkness, are alike known to him. By what means the ardent love of his heart to the meanest believer is to receive its full gratification, amidst the most complicated schemes from a thousand quarters to defeat it, he accurately perceives; and the expedients requisite to render every secret and open attempt on his measures abortive, are all within his reach. Eternity and immutability are written in fair and legible characters upon every excellence which adorns his person, and renders him the object of the supreme adoration

a Rom. iii. 25, 26. v. 21. b Col. ii. 9.

and love of the blessed above. Of his wisdom and power, his righteousness and truth, his clemency and love, it is equally true that they are unchangeable.

Can then his gospel, in which we have an exhibition of all these perfections concentrated as it were in a point, so that we here *with open face behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord a*; can this gospel, I say, be mutilated, changed, and destroyed? Can this fair and noble edifice, founded in the immutable purpose of God, constructed in all its parts with the most admirable symmetry, raised by an exertion of power that draws the attention of angels to it, and completed after a model absolutely perfect; can it receive improvement from the aid of human art and invention, or be laid in ruins by the hostile attacks of pride and malevolence? It is impossible.

Changes may take place in the natural and moral world. Princes may be driven from their thrones, kingdoms may be shaken to their very foundations, mighty states and empires may vanish into oblivion, the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, the sun may fly from his axis, the moon may be arrested in her course, the stars may fall, and all nature become one universal wreck: but the gospel can suffer no change, the Scriptures cannot be broken, the promise of God must be fulfilled, and the counsels of love respecting his church, and every individual that constitutes it, be carried into full effect. God has often shaken the earth and the powers of it, and we hear him saying in his word, *Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. But the things which cannot be shaken*, of which description is the kingdom we receive from the Lord Jesus Christ, and the gospel, which is the grand charter of its rights and liberties, *these remain b*—remain unmoveable amidst all the assaults of earth and hell. And if it be asked, What is the reason, the ground, the security of our hope? the answer you have in the text—JESUS CHRIST THE SAME YESTERDAY, TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER. *If then an angel from heaven were to preach any other gospel to us, than that which Christ and his apostles have preached, let him be accursed c.* We proceed now,

a 2 Cor. iii. 18. *b* Heb. xii. 26, 27. *c* Gal. i. 9.

THIRDLY, To consider the uses to which the doctrine in our text may be applied.

Many are the changes to which we are all liable in the present life, as hath been just observed. But whatever the revolutions may be which at any time take place in our persons and families, in the church of God and the world, however sudden and unexpected, and with whatever pleasing or alarming consequences they may be attended; the truth held up to our view in this discourse will have a happy effect, if duly regarded, to animate us to our duty, to reconcile us to our troubles, and to inspire us with tranquillity and joy. The aspect it bears to a great variety of cases, which might be profitably insisted on, we have not time particularly to consider. We shall therefore confine ourselves to the two objects which the inspired writer seems to have had chiefly in view.

1. *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines a.*

Many there were of this description in the primitive age of Christianity, such there have been in every age since, and such there are in the present times. If you ask me what these *divers and strange doctrines* are? instead of entering into a particular detail of them, I shall content myself with just mentioning certain first principles, which if duly applied, will assist you in determining what they are, and not fail to put you on your guard against them. The doctrines then that vacate and annul those eternal truths on which the authority of Scripture is built;—the doctrines which evidently tend to inflate the mind with pride, conceit, and self-confidence, and to lessen if not destroy our obligations to the duties of piety and benevolence;—the doctrines which are built on such a construction of Scripture, as would not occur to the mind of any plain and honest reader, and for which reason we frequently hear it applauded as the fruit of distinguished wit and penetration;—the doctrines whose principal recommendation is their novelty;—in fine, all those doctrines which militate against the proposition in our text, the grand hinge upon which the gospel of Christ turns: all such I cannot but think

a Verse immediately following the text,

strange doctrines, foreign to the Scriptures, and injurious to men's everlasting interests.

Novelty, to which the leading idea in the text stands opposed, cannot surely be applied to the gospel without manifest impropriety, indecency, and I will add, absurdity. Natural science, it is acknowledged, is in a progressive state. New discoveries are continually making. But they who would insinuate that the gospel is a novel business, or at least that a true statement of it is a discovery reserved to the present times, and in the course of things is yet further to be very materially improved; such men do great dishonour to the gospel. It ever was, is, and ever will be the same. And although the modus of many facts, and of some doctrines built thereon by the express authority of Scripture, was never designed to be fully explained in the present life, and therefore it is in vain to look for it to faculties incompetent to such explanation; yet the gospel itself, wonderful as it is, is clearly revealed in the Bible: and the very attempt to refine upon it, and make it palatable to the vitiated taste of depraved nature, may well induce a jealousy of the evil we are here guarded against. Let us then, bearing upon our minds this great truth, that Jesus Christ, and of consequence his gospel, is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever, see to it that we are not tossed to and fro, not triflingly amused, not vainly puffed up, not incautiously led aside, by divers and strange doctrines. And the best means to this end are, a diligent attention to the word of God, and *the having the heart established with grace a.*—But it is time I turn your view to the other practical use to which the sublime aphorism in our text is directed, and that is,

2. "A patient acquiescence in the will of God, when the ministers of this blessed gospel are taken from us by death *b.*"

Regard to our own interest, accompanied with an anxious concern for the cause of religion, induces many painful feelings on these occasions. But when we reflect that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; and of consequence, that deprived as we may be of eminently useful ministers, neither *our* interest nor *his* cause can essentially

a Verse after the text. *b* Verse preceding the text.

suffer, for the one he will take effectual care of, and the other shall most certainly prevail, and gloriously triumph over all opposition; when we reflect, I say, on these things, our minds are relieved and comforted, and with cordial submission we say, Let the will of God be done! This is the consolation I wish to offer you, my friends, on this mournful occasion. It is solid consolation, the noblest and indeed the only effectual consolation that can be proposed. May your thoughts dwell on this great truth! May you enter into the spirit of it! So will your countenances assume a cheerful air, and your dejected minds become serene and happy.

But affliction ought to be felt: it cannot otherwise be salutary. It is a debt too we owe the memory of our departed friend, to pour tears over his tomb. The blessed Jesus wept at the grave of Lazarus, even though he knew his death would be quickly fruitful of the happiest consequences to him, his family, and the interests of religion. To assist your sorrows therefore by calling up to your view the person, countenance, and attitude of our friend; his character, manner of life, anxieties, and joys; reminding you at every step I take, that *Jesus*, whom he so affectionately loved and faithfully served, *is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*; is not only allowable but expedient.

Were I then to describe him to you, standing where I now stand, dispensing to this numerous audience, with heart-felt pleasure and earnestness, that gospel, the sum of which hath now been given you; and then saying, in effect if not in so many words, *I know that ye all shall see my face no more*; were I thus to present him to your view, you would I am sure, like the Ephesian Christians at Miletus, *weep sore, fall on his neck, and kiss him, sorrowing most of all for the words he spake, that you should indeed see his face no more* a. But it is not to his person, his diction, his attitude only that I would recal your attention, but chiefly to his character and manner of life. And how glad should I be, pained as I am at my very heart for the loss of so good a man, and so affectionate a friend, had I his pen, his lips, to do that justice to his memory, which

a Acts xx. 25, 37, 38.

some of you cannot forget he did on a similar occasion to the memory of his honoured father *a*. We will however attempt it.

Dr. Evans was the son of the Rev. Hugh Evans, many years pastor of this church, and colleague of the venerable Mr. Bernard Foskitt. The son he was of his tender love and fervent prayers. The piety and abilities of that excellent man he inherited, of which he gave early proofs under his parental care and instruction. Of the warm and exemplary devotion with which he took upon him a profession of religion, in the church where I have the honour to preside, it was my happiness to be a witness. Having gone through the usual course of studies in the neighbourhood of London *b*, with the full approbation of able judges, he soon appeared in the character of a minister, with the hearty good wishes and prayers of the Christian society to which he belonged. His talents, which were highly pleasing and popular, were some time exercised in a congregation in the metropolis *c*, to the great satisfaction of his judicious friends, who solicited his continuance among them. But at your earnest and affectionate request he returned to Bristol, and after having preached about eight years among you, became colleague with his father in this church. So that he was your minister about thirty-two years *d*.

At his settlement I had the pleasure of assisting, and proposing to his imitation the example of the apostle Paul, *who served the Lord with all humility of mind, and many tears and temptations e.—To serve the Lord*, in this Christian society,

a In a Sermon on his decease, entitled "Elisha's Exclamation."

b At the Dissenting Academy at Mile-End, now at Homerton.

c Unicorn-yard, Southwark.

d He married in 1762 Miss Sarah Jeffries, the only daughter of the Rev. Joseph Jeffries of Taunton, Somerset; whose amiable character endeared her to all who had the happiness of her acquaintance. By her he had five children, three of whom are now surviving. She deceased in 1771. In June 1774 he married Miss Sarah Hazle, the daughter of a very respectable family in Bristol, and now his mournful relict.—In 1789 the Principal and Professors of King's College in the University of Aberdeen conferred on him the degree of Doctor in Divinity.

e Acts xx. 19.

in the seminary over which he presided, and in his extensive connections with the churches, I may venture to affirm was his grand aim, his persevering object.—That he served him *with humility* is evident, among many other proofs that might be mentioned, from the striking tokens he gave of a disposition, accompanied with the most candid and disinterested friendship, to prefer others before himself. Nor need you be told that his services, ever highly acceptable and edifying to you, were attended *with many tears and temptations.*

As a pastor he was faithful, laborious, and affectionate. His preaching was evangelical, experimental, and practical. His manner of address was grave but not formal, animated but not affected, commanding but not assuming. And it pleased God to crown the word thus preached with great success, as appears from the present flourishing state of this numerous congregation. Over the affairs of the church he presided with prudence, candour, and steadiness. He rebuked with all long-suffering, exhorted with all simplicity, and with a feeling heart administered comfort to the afflicted.

But his labours, in the pastoral office, were not confined to the house of God and the houses of his friends. Many occasional sermons he published, and other tracts *a* in defence of the leading truths of the Christian religion. Particular mention should here be made of his late "Discourses on the doctrine of a crucified Saviour," which you received at his hand with so much pleasure, and which he presented you and the world, as a memorial of his firm attachment to that fundamental doctrine of Christianity, the atonement, which he had ever made the grand topic of his ministry. So far was he from being ashamed of the cross of Christ, that he gloried in it; for it had been the power of God to his salvation, and to the increasing joy of his heart.

And yet amidst the zeal he felt for the truth, he knew how to exercise charity towards those from whom he differed. He was no bigot, he could not be such, for he well understood the

a His *Address to the serious and candid Professors of Christianity*, should here be particularly noticed, as it was so well received: it passed through five editions.

rights of private judgment, was sensible of the weakness of the human intellect, and felt the difficulties of truly upright minds on points wherein he and they could not agree. Every possible allowance therefore he was disposed to make for the mistaken reasoning of others, not daring to attribute what he accounted error to a depraved temper, without such evidence of the fact as could not be resisted. And all who loved the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, of whatever denomination, he cordially embraced, and was ever ready to serve to the utmost of his power. Zeal and love, steadiness and candour, seriousness and cheerfulness, integrity, I will add, and the most perfect frankness of temper, he considered not only as reconcileable, but as virtues which reflect a real glory on each other. With these his profession as a Christian and a minister was adorned, while his general character was held among all ranks of men in the highest respect for probity, honour, and benevolence.

Imperfections he doubtless had, but they were of such a kind, and contrasted with such real excellencies, that they who knew him required but a moderate degree of candour to overlook them. And although, on some extraordinary occasions, he might in a small degree be carried beyond that evenness of temper he aimed always to preserve, yet such warmth could produce only a transient effect upon their minds, who had continual proof before their eyes of the generous principles which uniformly governed his conduct. The restraints however he laid on himself, in some situations of peculiar trial, did singular honour both to his good sense and piety.

In such manner did he demean himself as a Christian minister and pastor of this church. Permit me, before I pass on to the other relations he filled in life, to address the people of his charge in a few words of sympathy and exhortation.

Those of you, my dear friends, whose heads now begin to be silvered with age, well know his manner of coming in and going out among you, from the earliest stage of his ministry to the close of his life. And I am persuaded the impressions made on your hearts, by his fervent zeal, by his tender sympathy with you in your sorrows, by his cordial friendship, and

by his prudent and exemplary conduct, will not soon be erased. No. I see the silent tear fall from your eyes, and can easily imagine from my own sensations what are the painfully-pleasing feelings of your hearts. He loved you and you loved him. May his memory be embalmed in your bosoms with a fragrance that no length of time can dissipate!

And you, my young friends, who received your first religious impressions from his awakening ministry, for whom he travailed in birth till Christ was formed in you, and who were initiated by his kind hand into the school of your divine Master; your sorrows abound. In the language of Thomas to his fellow-disciples you are ready to say, *Let us go and die with him a.* Deprived as you are of your spiritual father, your able instructor and guide, you may be allowed to weep. But let not your sorrow exceed its due bounds. Remember, your tears, if turned into a right channel, will become occasions of joy. Consecrate therefore, I beseech you, that grief you feel on this occasion to the glory of God, and your own furtherance in real piety. The frequent remembrance of those devotional exercises of your hearts under his ministry, which gave birth to your profession, will be of no small use to you in the future course of it.

With you all, my friends, I heartily sympathize. Your loss is great, very great; but Oh! how great is his gain! It is greater, far greater, than words can describe or heart conceive. Methinks I hear him bid you wipe up your tears, kindly adding in the language of his divine Master when he took his leave of the apostles, *If ye loved me you would rejoice, because I said I go unto the Father b.* But you have this further cause of joy, on which I would wish you to dwell in your meditations, I mean the consideration that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.* He changes not. He pities you, and in his own good time will send salvation to you. The place of his faithful servant whom he has received to the arms of his mercy, he can, and I trust will soon supply with a pastor after his own heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. To that end let me entreat

a John xi. 16. *b* John xiv. 28.

you to cultivate the most cordial friendship and unanimity among yourselves. Beside the advantage which will result thence to yourselves, you will thereby give the fairest proof, to all whose eyes are fixed upon you at this juncture, of that real affection you bear to his memory, whose departure, amidst these ensigns of death, you so feelingly lament. I beseech you also to pour out your united supplications to God for a large effusion of his Spirit upon you all; and may that fervency accompany your prayers, which so remarkably and pleasingly distinguished his on many occasions of social worship! Be thankful that he was continued so long among you, and that you reaped so much real pleasure and advantage from his enlivening and edifying ministry. In fine, *Remember him that had the rule over you, and who spake to you the word of God, and follow his faith, considering the end of his conversation a.*

A word I must also address to those who have long attended his ministry, but alas! remain still strangers to the vital power of religion. Would to God that his death may be the happy mean of effecting that, which neither his convincing reasonings nor his warm expostulations could compass! an object which he had much at heart, and which will I doubt not, when you come to have a right sense of things, greatly endear his memory to you. Call to mind the solemn truths he held up to your view, to awaken you to a serious concern for your everlasting salvation; the powerful arguments he urged upon you, to dissuade you from the service of sin and Satan; and the affectionate terms in which he represented to you the tender compassions of the Lord Jesus Christ for the chief of sinners, and the unsearchable riches of his grace. And seriously consider with yourselves what an awful account you will have to give at the tribunal of the great God, if you shall be found to have treated all these things with negligence and contempt. But I hope better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though I thus speak. May you behold his face on that great occasion with joy and not with grief, and share with him in those unutterable pleasures, to the enjoyment of which

a Verse before the text.

he so ardently wished to be the happy instrument of conducting you!

Hitherto we have considered Dr. Evans in the characters of a Christian minister and pastor, let us now view him in that of a tutor. His good sense and piety, the education he had received, his acquaintance with men and things, and the knowledge he acquired by diligent study and reading, all happily qualified him for this important office. A seminary for the instruction of pious young men for the ministry, had been long established in this city. But the respectability to which it quickly arose, upon his entrance on this department, was owing both to his generous and indefatigable exertions among his friends, and to the great ability, prudence, and diligence with which he presided over this excellent institution. The improvement of those committed to his care in useful literature, particularly in those branches of it which, with the blessing of God, might render them acceptable preachers of the word, was his earnest wish; and his incessant labours to that end were crowned with no small success. His sanguine expectations may indeed in some instances have been disappointed, yet he had the happiness of seeing many churches, in the neighbourhood and at remote distances, supplied from hence with able and successful ministers. Nor will those worthy and useful men easily forget the obligations they owe to his excellent instructions and wise counsels, all which they received from him, as with freedom and faithfulness, so also with fervent piety and endearing friendship.

The perfect harmony, too, which subsisted between him and a neighbouring minister lately deceased, who assisted in the academy *a*, reflected no small honour upon them both, while it contributed greatly to the success of the grand object they mutually had in view. The decease of that valuable man was one among the many afflictions which deeply wounded his heart. They are now, alas? both removed, and we deeply lament the almost irreparable loss. God can, however, and it is our earnest prayer that he will, supply the places which they with so much honour filled in this useful institution, by men

a Rev. James Newton.

endowed with the like gifts and graces which qualified them for these important stations!

May you, my young brethren, who by this affecting providence are deprived of your generous patron and able instructor, be comforted under your heavy loss with the consideration, that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*. That God who has taken away your master whom you dearly loved from your head, knows how to pour a double portion of his Spirit upon those whom he may raise up in his room. Call frequently to your remembrance the many seasonable instructions he daily gave you, the many fervent prayers he poured out for you, and the edifying example he set you. And may that affection which you wish to express in every possible way for his character and memory, be an additional motive to those more noble ones of zeal for the glory of God and the good of men, to stimulate you to the most diligent exertions, in the prosecution of your further preparatory studies for the ministry. So may you, my dear friends, having received that *unction from the holy One which teacheth all things*, appear with distinguished lustre in the Christian church, and *approve yourselves workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth*.

And now after what hath been said of this excellent man, in the characters of a Christian minister and tutor, it might naturally be supposed I should have little further to add respecting his exertions in public life. But it is otherwise. He considered himself as moving in a larger sphere than hath been described, and was disposed to embrace every opportunity that offered of glorifying God and promoting the good of mankind. Opportunities indeed he sought, and, favourable ones arising, he was ever solicitous to improve them to the purposes just mentioned. Among the many schemes he meditated for the public good, those of erecting and supporting schools for the instruction of destitute children, and clothing them *a*; and of building places of public worship in neighbouring villages *b*, deserve to be particularly mentioned. In

a Broadmead, Bristol; Downend and Mangotsfield, near Bristol.

b Downend, Thornbury, &c.

these offices of benevolence, so interesting to civil society and to the welfare of individuals, he laboured with great zeal and activity. And while he stirred up others to their duty, he failed not himself to set them an example. A narrow sordid spirit he abhorred: on the contrary, as he loved so he devised liberal things. Hospitality flourished in his house, and the assistance he cheerfully afforded to the poor, and to many useful schemes and institutions, received a check from no quarter but the duty he owed his family, and scarcely from that.

In the service of the churches far and wide, and especially in the west, he exerted himself with ardent zeal and indefatigable diligence. Of him it might be truly said, that *the care of the churches came upon him daily a*—care to supply those of them which were destitute with suitable ministers; to procure temporal assistance for such as were in deep poverty; to give advice upon questions of importance; and to compose differences, which tend to reflect a dishonour on religion, and unhappily obstruct its progress. *Who was weak, and he not weak? Who offended, and he burnt not b?* Many long and weary journies did he take to ordain ministers, to meet his associated brethren, and in concurrence with them to forward, by preaching and other social exercises, the cause of truth, piety, and love. But he did not always meet with those returns which might naturally be expected. On such occasions, however, he silently wept, committing his cause to God, and indulging no undue resentments against those who had failed in regard of affection and candour, as well as of that respect with which in point of common decency they ought to have looked up to him. But he was not to be discouraged by any of these painful circumstances, not by the unkindness of brethren, nor by the abuse of determined adversaries, from pursuing the path of duty, however rough, which Providence had marked out for him.

He often recollected the conduct and example of the apostle and his brethren in the ministry: nor could he easily forget what was their language under circumstances of peculiar discouragement. 'Giving no offence, say they, in any thing,

a 2 Cor. xi. 8. b Ver. 29.

that the ministry be not blamed; in all things we approve ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness, on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true: as unknown, and yet well known: as dying, and behold we live: as chastened, and not killed: as sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing: as poor, yet making many rich: as having nothing, and yet possessing all things *a*.' And however he was at times almost ready to faint, of which some tender expressions in his correspondence with me will not be easily forgotten; yet by the grace of God resuming his wonted resolution, he could add, 'None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself; so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God *b*.'

One affliction however he met with in the close of his pilgrimage, which rapidly expedited the moment of his receiving a bright crown at the hand of Jesus his righteous judge. But deeply wounded as was his heart, fraught with exuberant and disinterested friendship, no wound given, whether intentionally or otherwise, could reach his name, which had been rendered dear to all who knew him by a steady course of virtuous and benevolent actions. Yes. He felt the wound. He predicted the event. The last enemy he saw making hasty steps towards him. But he was prepared to meet him. Often had he expressed to me his wish to be gone, to recline his weary soul on the bosom of Jesus, to join associated angels and saints, and to drink at the fountain head of those living streams which make glad the city of God.

In the interval between his first paralytic seizure and that which put a period to his life, he had the possession of his reason, although a general languor prevailed over his frame.

a 2 Cor. vi. 3—10. *b* Acts xx. 24.

Great was the calmness of his mind, the gentleness of his spirit, and his patient acquiescence in the will of God; and with no small pleasure do his family recollect the pious and affectionate intercourses that frequently passed between him and them during his illness. Such was his concern to do good, that in the weak state he was a few days before his decease, he dictated a letter to a young friend and relation at a little distance, in terms which give a pleasing idea of the devout, tranquil, and benevolent frame of his mind. The cordial and tender manner likewise in which he often expressed his forgiveness of the injuries he had received, made a deep impression on the hearts of those who attended him; the remembrance of which, as it affords a striking evidence of his piety, they cannot but wish to retain, while at the same time they sincerely wish to forget the injuries themselves that were the occasions of it.

To such a degree of strength and vigour he recovered, in the course of about two months, from his first attack, that we began to flatter ourselves with the hope, that it was the will of Providence he should not only survive, but resume his former station of active usefulness. God however, in his infinite wisdom, had determined otherwise. On a sudden the shock was repeated, and left him for two days in a state of insensibility; at the close of which, the ninth of August, he gently fell asleep in Jesus, in the fifty-fourth year of his age. An age at which, in the course of nature, his continuance for ten or fifteen years longer might have been expected. In a sense however he might be said to have attained this last term, if we measure his life not by the efflux of time, but by the variety and multiplicity of his active exertions for the glory of God and the good of mankind.

And now having affectionately wept with the dear people of his charge, with our young brethren of whose studies he had the direction, with many a weeping church, and many a weeping friend; let us all mingle our tears with those of his surviving family, his numerous relations, and especially his deeply afflicted widow and children. Were it not, my friends, for the danger of touching too strongly your feelings, and giving

a too sharp accent to your sorrows, I might go out in a description of the virtues he exhibited in each of these relations, of which you have had many endearing proofs. To say to you who had the honour to derive from him, that he tenderly loved you, and was solicitously concerned for your temporal welfare, is to say no more than is true of most if not all others in the like intimate connection. But when I remind you of his ardent wish and uniform endeavours to promote your best and everlasting interest, you have then in your recollection the noblest proofs of genuine affection and cordial friendship. But need I remind you of these things? Methinks I have little occasion to do it now your minds are in so tender a state. You cannot forget, to use the language of Scripture, how affectionately desirous he was of you; how willing to have imparted to you his own soul, because ye were dear to him; and how earnestly he exhorted you to mind the grand concern, and to walk worthy of the religious privileges you enjoyed. These his efforts on your behalf, accompanied with earnest prayer to God, have I hope produced on your minds a salutary effect. If so they will not fail to endear his memory to you. And it cannot but give you pleasure to reflect, amidst your painful feelings on this sad occasion, that your affectionate and dutiful carriage towards him, of which he was pleasingly sensible, afforded him great comfort amidst the many anxieties and labours of his public station. May his wishes, in their utmost extent, be realized in every one of you! May that piety which warmed his heart and governed his life, dwell richly with all its power and consolations in your breasts! And may your lives exhibit to all around you a fair copy of that example he set you!

To the mournful relict of our dear deceased friend, it remains that I address a few words of sympathy and consolation. Your affliction, my dear Madam, is very great. A friend you have lost in whose society you enjoyed many intellectual and religious pleasures; a friend ever ready to counsel, assist, and comfort you; and a friend on whose arm you hoped to have gently leaned, while sloping the remainder of your way down the hill of life. But though deprived of so great a blessing,

you have many considerations of a consoling nature to reconcile you to your loss. Beside the reflection that all his sorrows are at an end, and that he is ineffably and eternally happy, you have the pleasure to reflect that it was ever your unremitting concern to soothe his cares, to animate his zeal, and to promote his usefulness as he passed to that blissful state. And it is your happiness also that his family, which were so dear to him, are disposed by motives of affectionate attachment to yourself, as well as the duty they owe to his memory, to contribute all in their power to your comfort the remaining part of your pilgrimage on earth. And above all it should afford unspeakable joy to your heart to reflect, that Jesus Christ is ever the same, and that you may therefore assuredly hope his kind hand will ere long safely conduct you to those mansions of eternal blessedness, whither he and many others of your relatives and friends are already arrived.

To close the whole. May we all be sensible of the brevity and uncertainty of human life, and of the great importance of being prepared for death! May we be followers of them who through faith and patience are now inheriting the promises! May their departure hence whom we dearly loved, have a happy effect to weaken our attachment to this vain world, and to accelerate our progress to a better! May we on all such occasions as these endeavour patiently to acquiesce in the will of God, knowing that he cannot do wrong! And may we aspire to a still nobler height of devotion, even that of glorying in tribulation, to which a firm persuasion of the great truth asserted in our text is capable of elevating us—JESUS CHRIST THE SAME YESTERDAY, AND TO-DAY, AND FOR EVER.

THE SUBSTANCE

OF

AN ORATION

DELIVERED AT THE INTERMENT

OF THE

REV. MR. JOHN MACGOWAN,

IN BUNHILL-FIELDS, DEC. 1st, 1780.

AN ORATION, &c.

THUS have we committed to the cold and silent grave the remains of our brother, whose decease is so much lamented by his family, his friends, and the church over which he presided. It will not be expected that I should enter particularly into his character, abilities, and usefulness: of these honourable mention will no doubt be made on another occasion. In the mean time it must be observed, that having by the grace of God maintained a worthy character, allowing for the imperfections to which all good men are liable, he died in faith, declaring that the gospel he had preached, not his having preached it, (for so he expressed himself) was the only foundation of his hope. And we have the happiness of being persuaded, that he is now the partaker of the blessed fruits of this hope in the realms of light and glory above.

My present business is to exhort you and myself to a right improvement of this awakening providence: an object to which, could our brother speak from his grave, he would wish me to urge your attention by every possible consideration.

Death is a very serious and solemn event. It is the king of terrors, and stands foremost in the list of human evils. It is tremendous in the apprehension of nature, but more so in that of conscience. It dissolves the union between soul and body, puts an end to all our businesses, interests, and concerns on earth, and hurries us into an unknown and eternal world. It is the common lot of all mankind, rich and poor, learned and unlearned, good and bad, men of every character, rank, and condition. There is no discharge in this war. Indeed, as to the exact time of our departure hence, that is only known to God. For wise purposes he has thrown an impenetrable veil over futurity, so that we can none of us tell the day of our death. But, when the moment fixed in the counsels of hea-

ven comes, no consideration whatever can prevail on the last enemy to suspend the execution of the sentence; not the aid of the most skilful physician; not the tears of the most affectionate friends; nor the prayers of the most eminent believer.

Since, therefore, death is so tremendous, the event itself so certain, and the time when it shall happen to us so doubtful, of how great importance is it that we are prepared for it? The general inattention of mankind to this matter affords a striking evidence of the miserable depravity of human nature. But, thoughtless as men in common are about death, methinks it is impossible for them, when they walk among the tombs of the dead, follow their friends to the grave, and see those with whom they had intimately conversed, amidst all the solemnity of funeral rites, committed to the silent dust, it is, I say, scarce possible for them, on such occasions, to suppress all emotion, and shut up every avenue to reflection and consideration. When the grave is open, it may be presumed the heart is open: and when we hear the sure prediction of our own approaching dissolution, from the dying lips of our friends, it would be strange indeed if we were to pay no serious attention to it.

Such circumstances of disgrace and misery accompany death, as put it beyond a reasonable doubt, that the great governor of the world hath inflicted it upon mankind as a punishment. The conscience of every man testifies that he hath sinned: and death hath passed on all men, for that all have sinned. But what is the consequence of dying? Do we cease to exist? Are we no more? If so, whence that vehement desire we all feel in our breasts of immortality? Whence that consciousness that we are accountable creatures? And whence is it that good and evil are so promiscuously dispensed to the children of men? It should seem a natural inference from these facts, that there is a state wherein the ways of Providence shall be satisfactorily explained, and the honours of the divine justice and goodness fully vindicated. But we do not address ourselves to those, who have only the dim light of nature and reason to direct their enquiries. You have the Scriptures in your hands, and you admit their divine authority.

And they expressly assure us, that as at death the body returns to the dust whence it was taken, so the spirit returns to God who gave it, to be disposed of by him in a state either of happiness or misery. And are we to exist in one or other of these states? Of what infinite moment is it to us, that we are prepared to meet the last solemn sentence, which will consign us over to the joys of heaven, or the miseries of hell!

It is not to be doubted, that there is a difference subsisting between God and man. Mankind are up in arms against their Creator. He is offended, and innumerable are the expressions of his displeasure against our world, amidst all the proofs he gives us of his patience and forbearance. Nor is it to be questioned, that men are depraved as well as guilty; that in their present vitiated state they are incapable of enjoying the refined pleasures of heaven, as well as that their sins have rendered them deserving of the pains of hell. The corruption of human nature, even though there were no Bible, would be capable of the clearest proof. In order, therefore, to our being happy after death, our sins must be forgiven, and our nature renewed.

And,—for ever magnified be the riches of divine grace!—the chief of sinners, who are truly sensible of their condition, have the noblest encouragement to hope, that they shall become the happy partakers of both these blessings. This encouragement arises, not only from the express assurances of Scripture, that God is placable; but from that wise and generous provision he hath made, by the mediation of Christ, for the remission of our sins upon the most equitable considerations, and for the renovation of our natures, by an influence the most effectual, and at the same time suited to our character as reasonable creatures.

This divine Saviour, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, was made flesh, and dwelt among us; he obeyed the law we had broken, bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows; and having, amidst inexpressible torments, become a victim to supreme justice on the cross, descended into the grave, and continued awhile under the dishonours of death. From the mansions of the dead he arose,

triumphed over the powers of darkness, and ascended through the clouds up into heaven, where he lives and reigns our Saviour and King. Commission he has given to his apostles and ministers, men of like passions with ourselves, to go into all the earth, and preach the gospel to every creature; to beseech men, in his stead, to be reconciled unto God; and to assure them, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life. The Holy Spirit he hath promised, to give energy to their reasonings and persuasions, and gradually prepare his faithful followers for a future state. And, at the appointed time, when the great objects of the present dispensation shall be attained, he will come in all the glory of his Father and the holy angels, raise the dead, change the vile bodies of his people, fashion them like unto his glorious body, sit in judgment upon the whole human race, and pronounce the final sentence of absolution or condemnation upon every individual of mankind. Thus life and immortality are brought to light, an end is made of sin, and everlasting righteousness brought in, death and the grave are conquered, Satan and all his mighty hosts vanquished, and every obstruction to our final happiness removed.

And now, from the general view we have taken of our guilt and wretchedness, of the stupendous facts reported to us in the gospel history, and of the glorious hopes founded thereon, what powerful arguments arise to persuade us to a serious consideration of our future state! These are matters deserving of our attention at all times, but more especially on such solemn occasions as these. We have here the ensigns of death spread around us, our eyes behold a pale and breathless corpse laid in the tomb, and we are ourselves making hasty advances towards our long home. A few days, months, or years at most, and we shall have done with all our connections on earth. The last enemy comes on his pale horse; and what if hell should follow with him? O that men were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end! Agree with the adversary now ye are in the way with him, lest he deliver you to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and so ye are cast into the prison of hell. Now is the accept-

ed time, now is the day of salvation. O that ye did but know, in this your day, the things that belong to your everlasting peace! What will it profit you, should you gain the whole world, and lose your immortal souls? Permit us to be earnest with you. The matter is of infinite importance. Knowing the terrors of the Lord, we persuade men.

I am sensible impressions made at the mouth of a grave are for the most part quickly erased: like the morning cloud, and early dew, they soon pass away. Men go hence, mingle with the world, enter into its cares and pleasures, and forget the convictions they had just received—the sensations they had just felt. God forbid that this should be your case to whom we now address ourselves! We beseech you, by the mercies of God, by the bowels of Christ, and by the regard you owe to your present and everlasting welfare, to consider these things. Go home, retire from the world, examine your hearts, read the Scriptures, prostrate yourselves at the feet of mercy, implore forgiveness and acceptance through Christ, and give not sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eye-lids, till such time as you have room to hope you are interested in the blessings of the new covenant. Faith and repentance are necessary to salvation; and except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. But Jesus Christ is exalted to give repentance unto Israel, and remission of sin: and him that cometh unto this divine Saviour he will in no wise cast out. You have therefore every imaginable encouragement to hope for mercy. And should you be so happy as to turn from your sins to God, by ingenuous sorrow and new obedience, how important will the effect be in regard of this life, of death, and of a future state! God will be glorified, your fellow-creatures benefited, and yourselves entitled to the noblest prospects and pleasures here and hereafter. Possessed of a good hope through grace, all will be well: you may pursue the duties of life with satisfaction, eat your bread with comfort, go to rest in peace, and meet death at last with tranquillity and fortitude. Your immortal spirits will then be received to the arms of divine mercy, your bodies will be raised and glorified at the second

appearing of Christ, and with him you will be happy, inconceivably happy, to all eternity.

Many useful and important lessons we are taught, while standing around the graves of our departed friends. Permit me just to mention some of them, and leave them to your silent reflection and consideration.

Here we learn how evil and bitter a thing sin is. This—O this! Sirs, is the true cause of all the sorrows we endure in our way through life, of the alarming appearance the last enemy assumes, and the tremendous miseries to which we are exposed in the world to come. Let us then dread sin, watch against every temptation to it, and use our utmost endeavours, with the aid of divine grace, to subdue its dominion in our breasts.—Here, likewise, we are taught a lesson of humility. Are you vain of your beauty, strength, or any other external accomplishment? Come view the place where you must shortly lie: go down into the chambers of the grave: call corruption your father, and the worm your mother and sister. All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth, and the grace of the fashion of it passeth away.—We are here, also, enabled to make a just estimate of the world. Ah! What are all its honours, profits, and pleasures? mere shadows that elude the pursuit of multitudes, disappoint the eager expectation of the possessor, and once enjoyed are almost instantly lost and gone. Did we frequently behold them with the eye of a dying man, or in the light they strike us on these occasions, we should not stretch every nerve to catch a feather, or risk our souls to acquire a bauble.—It is, likewise, the language of death, Awake thou that sleepest: redeem the time, for the days are few and evil: whatever thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, for there is no knowledge nor device in the grave whither thou hastenest.—And surely the consideration that they are going down apace to the silent tomb, should reconcile good men to their present afflictions of whatever kind they may be. Yes, Christians, death will prove your best friend. The sentence he shall pronounce in your ears, will dismiss you from all your pains and sorrows, anxieties

and fears; and introduce you to the land of light and vision, of happiness and glory. O blessed state, where the inhabitants shall no more say they are sick; where the kind and soft hand of him who hath redeemed them by his blood, shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and where there shall be no more pain, sorrow, or crying, no more sin or death, the former things being all passed away!

But I must not close this service without addressing myself in a few words to the family of our deceased brother, to the church of which he was pastor, and to those of us who fill the same honourable but arduous station from whence he is dismissed to a better world.

May God of his mercy sustain the heart of the sorrowful widow, reconcile her to this sad stroke, and be to her, not only a judge, but a never-failing friend and portion! And may you, my young friends, who are now pouring your tears over the tomb of your affectionate father, here receive impressions of the most salutary nature! Need I remind you of the deep concern he felt for your everlasting interests? They lay near, very near, his heart. Nor will it be unseasonable to report to you on this occasion what he said concerning you when in the views of death. Having expressed himself to me with all the affection of a tender parent respecting your dutiful and good behaviour hitherto, he added his earnest wish, persuaded of the necessity and importance of the new-birth, that his death might prove the occasion of your conversion. Recollect the many counsels and instructions he hath given you, and pray earnestly to God for his grace to enable you faithfully to improve them. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and you may be assured every needful good thing of the present life will be added.

As to you my friends, the church over which our brother presided; you are come hither to express the regard you owe to his memory; and no doubt are deeply affected with the loss you sustain by his death. But it is the will of God, and it becomes you to submit patiently to it. Be thankful for the advantage you have reaped from his ministry. Remember him that had the rule over you, and spake the word of God to you;

call to mind his counsels, reproofs, and exhortations; and his faith follow, considering the end of his conversation. And be comforted with the consideration, that however the heralds of life must themselves submit to death, as well as others, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Address your fervent and united prayers to him to sanctify this breach and repair it, and in due time, you may hope he will send you a pastor after his own heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.

In a word, may those of us who have the honour to dispense the word of life, be excited by this awakening providence to the diligent and faithful discharge of our duty! It will come to our turn, ere long, to die. Our lips, as well as his, must be closed in silence and death. Let us, therefore, fulfil our ministry, preach the word, be instant in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine. And let us comfort ourselves, amidst all the labours, anxieties, and discouragements that attend our work, with the blessed hope that when the chief Shepherd shall appear, we with all the humble disciples and servants of Jesus, shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.

A

SERMON

OCCASIONED BY THE DEATH

OF THE

REV. MR. SAMUEL BURFORD:

PREACHED

IN GOODMAN'S FIELDS, APRIL 24th, 1768.

JOHN XI. 16.—*Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus, unto his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him.*

SUCH was the language of an apostle on the death of a friend. And such may have been the language of some now present on this sad occasion—A sad occasion indeed! For what sight so moving, as that of a disconsolate widow, with a long train of helpless children, pouring out their tears over the remains of an indulgent husband and tender parent—a numerous people lamenting the loss of their affectionate and faithful minister—and many besides, expressing by their countenances the grief they feel, for being thus suddenly deprived of a dear relation, and an amiable friend? It is, I say, a peculiarly mournful providence. Yet, mournful as it is, it may be improved, with the blessing of God, to our real advantage. That I may assist your sorrows to that end, let me lead you into a consideration of the words just read.

The story to which they refer, is one of the most affecting narratives we meet with in the New Testament. And though it is not to our immediate purpose, to dwell on all the particulars of it; yet it is so extraordinary, that I can hardly be excused giving you a general view of the whole. And the rather as our Saviour himself declares, in the preceding verse, that what he did on this occasion, was with intent to prove the divinity of his mission.

Lazarus, a person of considerable eminence, and a very intimate friend and disciple of Christ, it seems fell sick. His sisters Martha and Mary, who had a most tender affection for him, and lived in the greatest harmony with each other, immediately dispatched a messenger to Jesus, saying, *Behold, Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick a.* They were in hopes that he would instantly come to their house, and had no doubt but that at his word, their brother would be at once restored to his former health.

a John xi. 3.

Our Saviour was at this time at a considerable distance. For Bethany, the village where Lazarus lived, was near Jerusalem, and he was now beyond Jordan, in the place where John baptized *a*. But upon receiving the message, instead of hastening away as they expected, he resolves to abide where he was two days longer *b*; signifying to those about him, that *this sickness was not unto death*, that is, to the utter loss of life, *but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby c*. A great disappointment doubtless this was to the two afflicted sisters, who were weeping by the dying bed of their dear brother. What joy would it have given them, to see the face of so able and compassionate a physician as Jesus! But ah! in vain do they expect him. Their tears and prayers avail nothing at present. Lazarus languishes—expires in their embraces.

Our Lord knowing he was dead, immediately sets out on his journey to Bethany *d*. When he gets near the place, Martha hearing the news of his approach, instantly runs to meet him; and overwhelmed with grief, addresses him in these sad and sorrowful words, *Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died e*. "Why, O why didst thou not pity us in our distress, and come, ere it was too late, to our relief? so had all this misery we now endure been prevented." But recovering herself from this hasty expression, which seemed to carry in it some reflection on our Saviour's compassion, she immediately adds, *I know that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee f*. Some gleam of hope seemed to arise in her breast, that Christ might even yet some way extricate them out of their trouble. He answers, affected doubtless with her extreme distress, *Thy brother shall rise again*. Yes, Lord, says she, *I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection of the last day*. "But ah! that will be a long time yet."—True, replies he, but *I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die. Believest thou this? Yea, Lord*, says she, *I believe that thou art*

a John x. 40. *b* Chap. xi. 6. *c* Ver. 4.
d Ver. 7. *e* Ver. 21. *f* Ver. 22.

the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world a. What an illustrious expression of faith was this! especially considering her present circumstances of grief and sorrow, and her disappointment at our Saviour's having refused to come, when her brother lay ill.

Upon this she hurries back to the house, beckons her sister Mary out of the room, where her friends sat with her condoling her loss, and tells her that *the Master was come, and called for her.* Mary silently quits the house, and flies to Christ, her friends supposing she was gone to the grave, to weep there. And being come, she falls down at his feet, and addresses him in the same passionate language her sister had used, and which excessive grief naturally prompted—What a moving scene was this! No wonder that those who stood around could not forbear weeping. Nay, such was the effect on Jesus himself, that he compassionately mingled his tears with theirs; insomuch that the Jews said among themselves, *Behold, how he loved him b.* Our Lord makes no direct answer to Mary, but asks where they had laid the body. And being come to the sepulchre, he commands the stone to be rolled away from the mouth of it. Which done, he lifts up his eyes to heaven, and says, *Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they might believe that thou hast sent me c.* When he had thus spoken, he cries with a loud voice —a voice which will another day reach the remotest part of the earth, and to which all nature shall be obedient—LAZARUS COME FORTH *d.* Lazarus, quickened by that almighty word, instantly comes forth and lives.

What an amazing display of omnipotence was here! Who that saw it could resist the evidence of his mission, or forbear falling down and worshipping the Son of God! What a striking emblem was this of that divine energy, which gives life to a sinner dead in trespasses and sins! What a lively representation of the resurrection of the dying interests of religion in future times! And what an assured pledge of that miraculous

a John xi. 23—27. *b* Ver. 36.
c Ver. 41, 42. *d* Ver. 43.

power, which shall be exerted in raising our dead bodies at the last day? Thus hath the Saviour proved himself the Son of God, by a kind of testimony the most clear and convincing in itself, and which was admirably suited to the dignity of his own character, and the importance of the errand on which he came. Thus hath he challenged our firmest faith in his doctrine and grace. And thus hath he kindled in our breasts the most cheerful hope of all the great blessings promised us in another world. But to return—

Lazarus lives. And who can describe the surprise, the joy, the gratitude, which his sisters and friends feel on this strange occasion? Him they receive again into their embraces, of whom they had the other day taken their final farewell. Him they again converse with, whom they just now thought they should no more behold till the day of the resurrection. How do they congratulate each other on this happy event! and strive which shall offer the highest praises to the Saviour, the God manifest in the flesh!—Such then was the salvation they received.

But such miraculous appearances we are not now to expect. Our departed friends are not thus to be restored to us again. It were presumptuous to wish it. Nor have we any occasion for such attestations as these to the truth. Yet the same Jesus still lives; still exercises a tender compassion for the mourning relatives of his dear disciples; and still assures them that *they who sleep in Jesus, God will* another day *bring with him a.*

But it is time we now look back to that part of the story, with which the text stands immediately connected. Our Saviour, you remember, upon receiving the message from Martha and Mary, that their brother Lazarus was sick, resolved to tarry where he was for a few days. At the close of which time signifying his intention to go again into Judea, his disciples vehemently dissuaded him from it, through fear of the Jews. But he tells them (such was his exact knowledge of events which happened at a distance as well as near) that *their friend Lazarus slept, and he must needs go to awake him out of his sleep. Lord, say they, if he sleep he shall do well. No*

a 1 Thess. iv. 14.

but, replies he in plain terms, *he is dead: and I am glad for your sakes, that I was not there, to the intent that ye may believe; nevertheless let us go to him. Then said Thomas, which is called Didymus* (that is, in the Hebrew Thomas, and Didymus in the Greek) *to his fellow-disciples, Let us also go, that we may die with him a.*

Curiosity would here naturally lead us to inquire particularly into the character of Thomas. But we can collect very little concerning him from the sacred writings. He was a good man, a sincere and faithful disciple of Christ, and one of the twelve apostles. The most remarkable circumstance related of him is his incredulity on occasion of our Saviour's resurrection from the dead: and which is the more astonishing, as it is probable he was an immediate witness of this miracle, of which we have been speaking. It should seem also from the language of the text, uttered it is likely with great vehemence and affection, that he was a man of strong passions, and of very tender feelings.

Some are of opinion that he had Christ in view, and meant going and dying with him. For the disciples had just before been dissuading him from going up to Jerusalem, for fear of the Jews. And if this were the sense of the words, they might be considered as the language either of peevishness and discontent —"If he will go and die, we may e'en as well go and die with him:" or rather, of tenderness and love—"How can we bear the thought of parting with our Master? What comfort shall we have of our lives when he is gone? No. We will follow thee, Lord, even unto death. Where thou goest, we will go; where thou lodgest, we will lodge; where thou diest, we will die, and there will we be buried: nought but death shall part thee and us *b*."

But though I make no doubt this was the temper of the disciples towards Christ, yet I think it is most natural to conclude from the connection of the words, that Thomas had his friend Lazarus in view. "Lazarus is dead," says Christ, "nevertheless let us go to him." "Yes," says Thomas, "we will go and die with him." How moving the expression! And when

a John xi. 11—16. *b* Ruth i. 16, 17.

taken in its utmost latitude, how full of the most useful and important instruction!

Considering the text in this light, it will be my business to collect as nearly as possible the sense of the words, and the temper in which we may reasonably suppose they were spoke; and to improve them as we go along to our own use.

Now the words will admit of either a good, or a bad interpretation, that is, they may be considered as spoke in a peevish hasty manner, and under the influence of immoderate passion; or else in a serious, spiritual, heavenly temper of mind, and as became a good man and a Christian. The latter I should charitably suppose was the case. And yet I think it is very imaginable, that with all this affection which Thomas expresses for his friend Lazarus, and with all his eager desire of a better world, there was a mixture of imperfection, weakness and sin. The operations of the human mind are very quick, subtle, and complex. So that the justest sentiments may be clouded with a degree of error, and the purest affections be adulterated with a tincture of irregular passion. How far therefore this language of his was commendable, and how far it was deserving of censure, I shall endeavour to shew, while I am laying before you the several sentiments, which the words seem naturally to suggest.

I. They may be considered as a lively and passionate expression of his friendship for Lazarus, and of the grief he felt for his death. "Lazarus is dead. The loss is exceeding great. How shall we bear up under this severe stroke of providence? Let us go and die with him."

Now the sorrow he endured on this occasion, so far as it was held under the restraints of reason and religion, was natural, innocent, and I may add, commendable. Lazarus was a good man, beloved of Christ, endowed with many amiable qualities, and it should seem from some hints concerning him, a person of considerable influence and usefulness. Our Saviour and his disciples had often been entertained at his house, they had enjoyed great pleasure in his conversation, and had maintained an intimate and cordial friendship with him. He had been a useful member of society, had done much good in his neighbourhood, and bore an extraordinary character among his ac-

quaintance. Was it therefore to be wondered, that such a man as Thomas, in whose breast the tender feelings of humanity were united with the generous sentiments of friendship, should be deeply affected with the sad news of the death of one he so dearly loved? To have suppressed all grief would have been to counteract the principles both of reason and religion. And could that be right? Nature must, nature will have its course—"Ah! we shall see his face no more—no more enjoy his society—no more profit by his discourse—no more be blessed with his prayers, his counsels, his reproofs. His sisters will be overwhelmed with sorrow. His friends, his neighbours, and all that knew him will join in the lamentation." Such reflections could scarce be made without a deep sigh; and if they would not justify, they might however excuse the wish that followed, "Let me go and die with him. I am distressed for thee, my brother Lazarus, very pleasant hast thou been unto me. We were one in life. O that we had not been divided in death *a*!"

There are no principles so favourable to true friendship, and which tend so much to refine and improve it, as those of virtue and religion. Friendships thus formed are the most beneficial, endearing, and durable. And as the loss of friends may very well be numbered among the most painful afflictions of the present life; so it would be strange, if religion, which hath an aspect thus favourable to friendship, did at all discountenance sorrow on these occasions. An affected insensibility to any kind of trouble is far from being commendable. It is unworthy of a man, much more of a Christian. There is a degree of impiety, I was going to say, of atheism in it. For if there be *no evil in the city, but God hath done it b*; to seem not to feel it, is to deny that he hath any concern in it, or however to treat his influence in such dispensations, with an indifference which is very indecent and unbecoming. *My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord c.* As therefore sorrow for the death of our departed friends is in itself natural and reasonable, and is a tribute we owe to their memory; so it is an expression of regard due to the providence of God, who

a 2 Sam. i. 23, 26. *b* Amos iii. 6. *c* Heb. xii. 5.

sees fit thus to chasten and afflict us. Christ himself wept, and he allows his people to weep, and to express their grief to each other, on such mournful occasions as these.

On the contrary, there is such a thing as excess of sorrow. This frequently happens. And it is not improbable but it might be the case here. The good man's passions might be wrought up too high. And if so, his wishing to die with Lazarus was worthy of censure, as it argued an immoderate affection to this friend, to the exclusion of a due regard to others; and as it betrayed impatience, and the want of a becoming submission to the will of God. Though Lazarus was removed, he had other friends left. And though he had been bereaved of them all, could he forget that God still lived; and that therefore it became him to acquiesce in his pleasure, and to restrain his passions from having so far the mastery over him, as totally to unfit him for the enjoyments and duties of life? Nay, one would have thought, the consideration that Christ was still here on earth, should have contributed not a little to produce this effect. So far therefore, as his grief was immoderate, it was sinful. And hence we should learn, be our affliction what it may, to take heed that we do not throw the reins upon the neck of our impetuous passions, and abandon ourselves to sorrow: lest we thereby offend God, and essentially injure ourselves.

II. The language of the text may be expressive of a happy indifference to the present world, and a cheerful readiness to leave it—A high and noble attainment this!

Every good man must needs be sensible of the vanity of the world. It is a lesson which observation as well as religion teaches. How trifling, how uncertain, how unsatisfying are all the enjoyments of time and sense! Look around you and say, you who possess a well-grounded hope of a future happy immortality, what is there here that is worth living for, excepting the comforts of religion, the satisfactions of friendship, and the prospect of being useful? Is the transient pleasure that arises from the gratification of the senses, from the possession of increasing wealth, or from the vain applause of men, an adequate compensation for all that anxiety, labour, satiety,

and many times painful reflection, which attends the pursuit and the acquisition of these objects? A heathen, impressed with these considerations, could say, speaking of death, "When thou art set out on thy journey, do not wish to turn back again." What reason, what superior reason hath a Christian, to approve—to applaud such advice! How strange then that a soul formed for eternity, and which is quickly to enter upon that unchangeable state of existence, should fondly caress the objects of sense, and with eagerness cry out at the apprehension of its departure hence, I will not, I cannot leave you! But strange as it is, this is a temper which very generally prevails, and in a degree among Christians themselves. And to what is it owing, but to the want of a lively sense of this great truth, which observation and experience clearly teach? For however ready we are in common to acknowledge the vanity of the world, it does but rarely strike our imagination, I should say our consciences, in such a manner as to produce any solid effect.

Now afflictions, not to speak here of the firm faith of a future state, have an immediate and direct tendency, with the blessing of God, to fix upon our hearts a practical sense of the vanity of the world, and to beget in us indifference to it. For this purpose therefore among others, God is pleased to exercise us with afflictions. And there are, perhaps, none better fitted to produce this effect on the minds of Christians, than the loss of good men. These are the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the friends of mankind, and the greatest blessings to society. The enjoyment of their friendship and conversation, and the prospect of being instruments with them of promoting the good of our fellow-creatures, are the best commendations of life, and the noblest inducements to a cheerful continuance here. Can it be wondered then, that the removal of such persons should, in proportion to our apprehension of their usefulness, and the affection we have felt for them, awaken that sense of the vanity of the world which was almost expiring in our breasts; weaken, if not dissolve our attachments to present things, and make us willing to quit the stage of life, and be gone? Surely a good man may be allowed to say,

especially while under the immediate impression of such a providence, "Let me go and die with my friend. The world now appears less amiable in my view than it ever did. I have lost that eager gust I once had for its delights and pleasures. I am content to bid them all adieu. Yea, I would gladly be gone, so I may but enjoy communion with my God, and with the spirits of just men made perfect in a better state." Nay, I may venture to affirm, that such language, when the effect of deliberate consideration, as I have no doubt it is in some instances, is not only to be justified, but is highly commendable. The temper it breathes is a truly noble attainment! an acquisition infinitely to be preferred before the possession of the brightest crown, the fairest kingdom on earth! *I have a desire to depart*, said the apostle, *and to be with Christ, which is far better a.*

But here also I must observe, as under the former head, that there is danger of running into the opposite extreme. Nor is it improbable that Thomas was in this respect somewhat blame-worthy. Perhaps the news of the death of Lazarus might put him too much out of humour with the present life. "Let me go and die with him. My enjoyments in this world are now at an end. I expect no more comfort this side the grave. I am weary of life, its business and its sufferings. I had rather therefore die, and with my friend Lazarus be interred in the silent tomb. There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest *b.*" So the prophet Jonah, displeased with the conduct of Providence, impatiently wishes for death, saying, *It is better for me to die than to live c.* But this is an unbecoming temper. Your indifference to the world, I speak to those who thus peevishly quarrel with Providence, will not justify such indecent reflections as these upon the present life. Though the house of your pilgrimage here on earth, is mean and contemptible, in comparison of that fair mansion, which Christ hath prepared for you in heaven; yet it is not without its conveniencies and accommodations. Though your disappointments and afflictions are numerous; yet a merciful God fails not to mingle many comforts and joys with them.

a Phil. i. 23. *b* Job iii. 17. *c* Jonah iv. 8.

And whatever reason you may have, under some particular circumstances especially, to be dissatisfied with the world; yet it is your indispensable duty, to wait patiently all the days of your appointed time till your change cometh. A striking example we have of this cheerful concurrence with the will of God, in the apostle Paul, who though he could not but wish to depart and be with Christ, as he well knew that would be infinitely to his advantage; yet was content to abide in the flesh, for the purposes of God's glory and the good of his church *a*. And indeed upon this principle, the Christian, whose temper and views are the most sublime and elevated, ought not to account his life long and tedious, even though it were protracted to the age of Methuselah. Again,

III. If we consider the words as a deliberate sentiment of the mind; they are farther expressive of an admirable serenity and composure of temper, at the thought of dying. *Let me go and die.*

He speaks of this great change with the like calmness and indifference, that another would of undressing himself, and going to rest. O happy man! To him, it seems as if death had lost all its terrors, and had assumed a mild and gentle aspect. He could welcome the last enemy as his friend, or however offer him the same challenge a fellow apostle afterwards did, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory b?* Nor is this temper peculiar to Thomas. It is attainable by us, upon the principles of the gospel, and actually hath been attained by many Christians.

It is true, we none of us know what it is to die, having never yet made the experiment ourselves, nor ever conversed with those that have. And our want of a precise idea of death, is a circumstance that may perhaps contribute to heighten our dread of it. Yet we are sure it is a very important and awful event. It is the grand crisis of nature; the dissolution of that secret band, which holds soul and body together. The pangs of it, as may be gathered from external appearances, are often very distressing; and the solemnities that attend it, usually strike horror into the minds of beholders. It is the king of terrors.

a Phil. i. 24. *b* 1 Cor. xv. 55.

It stands foremost in the list of natural evils; not to speak here of the dread it derives to the conscience of some, from a sense of sin, and the apprehension of future punishment. Permit me to describe it in the words of an ingenious writer, who thus realizes it—"When I shall lie faint and languishing upon my dying bed, with my friends all sad about me, and my blood and spirits waxing cold and slow within; when I begin to reckon my life, not by the striking of the clock, but by the throbbings of my pulse, every stroke of which beats a surrender to the pale conqueror; in this great ebb of nature, when the stream of life runs low, and the wheel at the cistern can hardly turn round its circle, it will then be no pleasure or comfort to my departing soul to reflect upon the great estate I have got, upon the family and name that I have raised, or upon the honours and preferments that I have gone through: no, my soul will then have a new taste as well as my body, and I shall need another angel to support and strengthen me in that great and last agony *a*."——How tremendous is death, when thus beheld, striking his relentless dart into the sinner's breast, and summoning him hence before the tribunal of his Judge! Nor is it to be wondered, if Christians themselves, especially under some particular circumstances, shrink back at the stroke, and feel a painful reluctance to what is so contrary to nature. Instances there have been of those, who though happily freed from a slavish dread of the consequences of this great event, yet have trembled at the event itself.

The fear of death is however to be subdued, be the cause whence it proceeds what it may. The Son of God hath entered the lists with this mighty foe, disarmed him of his chief terrors, and led captivity captive. He hath himself passed the gloomy vale, endured all the horrors of it, and provided for the defence and comfort of his people in their way through it. *By dying, he hath destroyed him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and so delivered them, who through fear of death, were all their life-time subject to bondage b.* How unspeakable are our obligations to his condescension and love! *Thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord*

a Norris's Pract. Disc. p. 165. b Heb. ii. 14, 15.

Jesus Christ a. Upon these principles the most timorous Christians, some of them at least, have assumed amazing resolution at the approach of the last enemy; even in the midst of the valley of the shadow of death, they have feared no evil. Of their dissolution, they have spoke with the utmost composure, as of putting off their tabernacle, being unclothed, and sleeping in Jesus. Nay they have not only obeyed, but welcomed the summons, and, with a smile upon their countenances, most cheerfully yielded their souls into the hands of a faithful Creator.

How great a happiness is it to meet death, in such a temper of mind as this! And indeed, how desirable, while we are in the midst of life, to have those painful apprehensions of it, to which we are so generally liable, in a good measure removed! The greater part of mankind owe the tranquillity they enjoy, purely to a thoughtlessness about futurity. When ever the idea of death is by any circumstance forced upon them, they are unhappy. The only way they have therefore to secure their peace, is industriously to avoid all occasions for such thoughts. But is not this very unmanly? Is it not a conduct deserving of censure, as well upon the principles of nature as religion? What man then is so much to be envied as he, who can, upon proper occasions, with deliberation and composure, speak the language of the text; who hath been so familiar with death, and in whose breast the dread of it is so thoroughly vanquished, as that he can in the midst of life, and its most cheerful scenes, advert to this subject without uneasiness; can turn his eye undaunted on the tomb; and read the hand-writing on the wall, "Thy days are numbered," without either paleness of countenance, or tremor of heart *b*! And where may we reasonably expect to meet with these happy persons, if not among them who believe that Jesus died and rose again; and who have entered into the spirit of that divine doctrine, which hath brought life and immortality to light? And this leads me to observe,

IV. That we can hardly suppose Thomas knew what he spake, without admitting that he felt the force of that great

a 1 Cor. xv. 57. *b* Dan. v. 5, 6, 26.

truth, which is the only natural and proper ground of reconciliation to death; I mean the certainty of a future state.

Had there remained a doubt upon his mind, whether he or his friend should exist beyond the grave, he would scarcely have been so forward to say, *Let us go and die with him.* No; he knew that the soul is immortal, that at the instant it quits the body it returns to him who gave it; and having been renewed by divine grace here, is made happy with God for ever. This he had collected not merely from the feeble dictates of nature, and from the generally received opinion of those around him; but from the assured testimony of Scripture, and from the express declarations of his Lord and Master. With him, it is probable, he had often discoursed on this subject; and received all the satisfaction upon it he could reasonably desire. And the belief of a future state of happiness, thus deeply impressed upon his heart, and accompanied with a clear evidence of his own title to it, might well excite a wish in his breast, that he had died with Lazarus.

Nor can any thing short of a firm faith of this great truth, effectually and properly reconcile us to the prospect of death. Nature abhors annihilation: we start back at the very idea of it. They indeed who through the indulgence of sin have lost all courage, are become incapable of any farther enjoyment here, and have not the shadow of a hope that they shall be happy hereafter, may sincerely wish to be annihilated. And it is possible that a flattering expectation of this sort, may have been the inducement with some wicked men, to take up the desperate resolution of putting an end to a wretched life, which they were no longer able to endure. But they who are not thus weary of their existence, require a different motive to reconcile them to death, from this unnatural one which infidelity would suggest; I mean the pleasing hope of a future happy immortality.

And what reason have we to be thankful, that this grand leading principle of religion, is established upon a kind of testimony, the most satisfactory to a thoughtful and inquisitive mind, and which it is not in the power of all the art and sophistry of wicked men, or of Satan himself, to invalidate! For

besides the probable arguments arising from the perfections of God, from the nature and constitution of man, as an accountable creature; from that vehement desire of immortality, which is deeply implanted in each of our breasts; from the present promiscuous dispensation of rewards and punishments; and from the opinion and consent of the wisest and best of men; I say, besides these probable arguments, we have in our Bible a more sure word of prophecy respecting this important point, to which we do well to give heed, as to a light shining in a dark place. The Scriptures tell us in plain terms, that *there is a reward for the righteous a!* that *there remaineth a rest for them b;* that *their end is eternal life c; that they shall see God d; enter into the joy of their Lord e; be with Christ where he is to behold his glory f;* and *inherit a kingdom prepared for them before the foundation of the world g. Life and immortality are thus clearly brought to light through the gospel h.* And to this *lively hope we are begotten again, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead i.* If therefore we believe the divinity of the sacred records, authenticated as they are by the most stupendous miracles, and by the exact fulfilment of a long series of prophecies; if we believe, that at the command of Jesus, Lazarus came forth out of the tomb, and that Jesus himself, having bowed the head and died, brake asunder the bars of death and the grave, and ascended triumphantly up into heaven; if, I say, we give credit to these great facts, there can remain no doubt upon our minds, of the certainty of a future state of happiness.

But it is not the bare admission of this great truth, or a general assent to it, that will subdue the fear of death, and dispose us, amidst many agreeable prospects and connections, to take a cheerful leave of the present life. Many there are, who though they would account it hard to be deemed infidels; yet feel as little real effect from their faith, as if they were, strictly speaking, of that character. To enable us therefore to speak the language of the text, with deliberate pleasure and

a Psal. lxviii. 11. *b* Heb. iv. 9. *c* Rom. vi. 22.
d Matt. v. 8. *e* Matt. xxv. 21. *f* John xvii. 24.
g Matt. xxv. 34. *h* 2 Tim. i. 10. *i* 1 Pet. i. 3.

triumphant joy, it is not only necessary that we are thus persuaded upon rational considerations of the existence of a future state; but that we have,

V. Elevated conceptions of the blessedness of heaven, and a well-grounded hope of enjoying it.

Thomas, it is I think reasonable to suppose, possessed more than a cold, faint, languid idea of another world, when he expressed this his ardent wish to accompany his friend Lazarus thither. Heaven, it may be, was brought down into the good man's heart, and kindled a flame of divine affections there. Who shall say, what sentiments he might form of the blessed God, and of the rich and growing entertainment, which results from the contemplation of his infinite perfections? Who shall say, how his imagination might be struck with the splendour and glory of that world; and his relish for the pure and spiritual pleasures which are there enjoyed, might be heightened and improved? While at the same time *he knew in himself*, through the riches of divine grace, that this *better and enduring substance* was his *a*. Well might a man, whose thoughts were thus employed, and whose hopes and views were thus elevated, say with impatient desire, "Let me go and die with him," who dies to live for ever! This is the kind of faith 'that overcomes the world *b*,' and gives the mind a noble superiority to those many considerations, which check the aspirations of the heart to heaven, and depress the spirits in the view of death. This is that faith, which the apostle emphatically describes as 'the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen *c*.'

And now, by what terms shall I represent the blessedness of that state, so as to raise your hearts and my own thither, and so as to impress on our breasts some cheerful and enlivening sentiments, upon this mournful occasion? Shall I to this end have recourse to figures? These, though they are collected from Scripture, will fail of giving us an adequate idea of heaven. We read of 'durable riches and righteousness *d*;' of 'treasures which moth cannot corrupt, nor thieves break

a Heb. x. 34. *b* 1 John v. 4.
c Heb. xi. 1. *d* Prov. viii. 18.

through and steal *a*;' of 'a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory *b*;' of 'an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away *c*;' of 'a rest that remaineth for the people of God *d*;' of 'a paradise furnished with the richest fruits, gladdened with the most delightful scenes, and watered with rivers of pleasure *e*.' We read of a country, 'whose inhabitants no more say they are sick *f*,' and where the 'Lamb who is in the midst of the throne, feeds them, and leads them unto fountains of living water; and God himself with his own soft hand, wipes away every tear from their eyes *g*.' What shall I say?—of 'a house not made with hands *h*;' of 'a city whose builder and maker is God *i*;' and of 'a kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world *k*.' But these are only emblems, distant and faint representations of a happiness that is spiritual and substantial, and which infinitely exceeds any thing we can possibly frame an idea of by our senses. 'Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him *l*.'

See the immortal spirit quitting this tenement of clay, and taking its flight to the celestial regions. See it conducted by angels, amidst the congratulations of innumerable kindred spirits, into the immediate presence of God, embraced in the arms of infinite love, and pronounced happy and glorious for ever. See it instantly made capable of all the exalted pleasures, and cheerful services of the heavenly state; the understanding enlarged, and freed from the numerous errors and prejudices with which it was just now embarrassed; the will perfectly renewed, and delivered from every evil bias and sinful temptation; and the affections all pure and spiritual, ever aspiring to the highest good, and ever enjoying the fullest satisfaction, without the least mixture of satiety or discontent. O the refined delights which the happy saint feels, thus formed after the image of him who created him, in contemplating the perfections of the great God, in surveying the transcendent

a Matt. vi. 20. *b* 2 Cor. iv. 17. *c* 1 Pet. i. 4. *d* Heb. iv. 9.
e Luke xxiii. 43.—Rev. xx. 1, 2. *f* Isa. xxxiii. 24. *g* Rev. vii. 17.
h 2 Cor. v. 1. *i* Heb. xi. 10. *k* Matt. xxv. 34. *l* 1 Cor. ii. 9.

excellencies of the blessed Jesus, and in dwelling upon the mysteries of providence and grace! O the pleasure he enjoys in the quick and easy discovery of truths, which the wisest men in this world have sought, and sought in vain; and in the immediate vision of objects, too glorious for any mortal eye to behold! How is every divine passion excited and inflamed! And with what joy, and love, and wonder doth his breast burn, while he reflects on all the great things his God hath done for him, while he views himself emerged out of ignorance, sin and sorrow, into light, purity and happiness; while he beholds his Redeemer face to face, and looks forward to an eternal duration of existence, with a steady assurance, that his felicity and glory shall suffer no interruption, diminution or end!

And do you, Christian, firmly believe that there is such a state of happiness as this? Do you consider it as the fruit of the free and unmerited favour of God, through the mediation, sacrifice and righteousness of his own Son? Are you formed, by divine grace, into a temper suited to it? And have you, in a word, a humble hope that, unworthy as you are, you shall at death be put in possession of it? Sure I am, the joyful, the transporting, the assured prospect of all this bliss and glory, must needs constrain you to say as Thomas did, when you hear of a fellow-disciple being gone thither, *Let me go and die with him:* especially when you reflect, that in this your wish is included,

VI. And lastly, a cheerful hope of enjoying *his* company, and that of your other friends and fellow-saints in heaven.

This pleasing expectation, there is little room to question, the apostle Thomas possessed. He had no doubt but Lazarus was gone to a better world: thither he would therefore fain accompany him, that he might there enjoy in the highest perfection all the pleasures of that friendship, which had so happily commenced between them here on earth. "We have been united in life, let us be united also in death. O may my soul be gathered *with his!* May I enter *with him* into the joy of the Lord!" Such might be his views.

And a very powerful influence there surely is in this consideration, under some particular circumstances especially, to

detach our hearts from this vain world, and unite them to another. Every instance of mortality among our dear Christian friends, may be considered as a weight taken out of the scale of our present, and put into that of our future and eternal interests; as an additional argument or motive to quicken us in our way home. Here but little agreeable society is to be had; but few to be met with, to whom we can freely unbosom ourselves; yea none in whose friendship we can be perfectly happy. On which account, as well as many others, we are sometimes apt to say in the language of Job, *I loath it, I would not live always a;* or of the prophet, *This is not my rest, it is polluted b.*

But in heaven it is otherwise. That cheerful climate, that friendly country, admits of no such complaints as these. There we shall join the most instructive, amiable, and delightful company. There we shall associate with *the general assembly and church of the first-born, with innumerable angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect c.* There we shall be incorporated into a society, made up of persons most wise, holy and happy; who are all of one mind, and one heart; and who possess every imaginable excellence, to recommend them to each others' esteem and friendship. O what divine and cordial affection prevails among those pure and exalted spirits! O how they are entertained and ravished with each others' sweet and improving conversation! Not one jarring note is to be heard through the heavenly choir. All is peace, and love, and joy there. There Thomas is for ever in the embraces of his friend Lazarus; and there Lazarus is for ever richly repaying Thomas, for the tears he had shed at the news of his departure hence. Patriarchs and prophets, apostles and martyrs, Christians of every age, character, and condition, dwell together there in perfect harmony: discourse on the sublimest subjects, without the least distance or reserve; and partake largely, even to their utmost wishes, of each others tempers and joys. There all the sweets of the most generous love, and of the most exalted friendship, are relished and enjoyed in their highest perfection.

a Job vii. 16. *b* Mic. ii. 10. *c* Heb. xii. 22, 23.

What man who hath any taste for friendship, and whose taste for this real blessing is improved and heightened, by a happy experience of the love and grace of the gospel, but must ardently wish to make one among this blessed company? Or however, through various causes, the Christian's attention may be too frequently diverted from these contemplations, and so the devout affections of his heart become strangely cold and languid; yet when death dissolves some of his most agreeable connections, and so rouses him from his lethargy, how can he avoid feeling the force of this reasoning as to a better state? While his thoughts follow the departed spirit to those blessed abodes, surely love to his friend, united with sincere affection to Christ, must have the happy effect to raise his desires thither.

Thus have I endeavoured to collect, as nearly as possible, the sense of the words, and to improve them to our own use. And now, let us pause, and seriously inquire, each of us, how we are affected towards death, and its important consequences.

'It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment *a*.' The sentence is passed upon all the human race, upon persons of every rank and condition. The prince must retire from his palace, as well as the peasant quit his cottage. And since there is the greatest solemnity and importance in death, and we know not how soon, or how suddenly, it may come to our turn to die; of what infinite moment is it that we are prepared! It will yield us little comfort in that awful, that trying hour, that we possess an abundance of the things of this life, that we have numerous friends, that we stand high in the opinion of our fellow-creatures, that we have borne the name of Christians, or that we have imagined ourselves such; if it should be then found, that we are strangers to real and vital religion.

Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God b. So he hath declared, who hath not only the keys of hell and death in his hand; but the bliss and glory of heaven at his disposal. Sin hath brought ruin upon our nature. We must be sensible therefore of the guilt and misery in which we

a Heb. ix. 27. *b* John iii. 3.

are involved, and of our need of that salvation which the gospel reveals and proposes. We must have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and repentance towards God. The power of sin must be broken, and our will and affections renewed. And though absolute perfection is not attainable here, yet we must aspire to the likeness of God, and from evangelical motives aim at universal obedience. Happy man! who thus cheerfully rests all his hopes of salvation on the free mercy of God, through Jesus Christ; and who considers his highest happiness, as consisting in the favour of God, and a conformity to his image. This is real religion. Do we possess it? Have we entered into the spirit of it? If so, we shall feel more or less of that temper, in regard of death and a future world, which I have been describing. When a dear relation, an intimate friend, or a minister, by whose labours we have been profited, is called away from hence to heaven; we shall be apt to say, deeply impressed by the providence, *Let me go and die with him.*

This, I persuade myself, hath been the language of some to whom I now speak, upon the present very mournful occasion. Nor is such language to be censured, expressive as it is of humanity and tenderness, as well as a desire of being happy with God; provided it be spoke under the restrictions that have been mentioned. The providence is peculiarly solemn, awakening, and instructive: many circumstances concur to render it so. Death is indeed daily walking our streets, entering the houses of persons of all ranks and characters, and making continual depredations upon us. But the triumphs of death, in this instance, are uncommonly striking. We see him laying his hand, not upon a useless member of society, not upon a good man in a private station, no, nor upon a Christian in advanced life, or who had been long struggling under the languors of a declining constitution; but upon a valuable minister, in the midst of his days and usefulness, the father of a large and young family, the pastor of a numerous church, in a very sudden manner, and at a time when the stroke was little apprehended, and when to our view he could on many accounts, be very ill spared. Considerations these, which may naturally

be supposed to affect the hearts of all good men among us, and especially those to whom I am now addressing myself.

It becomes us, my friends, to be humble under the mighty hand of God, to inquire into the cause why he thus deals with us, and to be careful to improve this awakening dispensation to the glory of God, and our own spiritual advantage. The loss, I am sensible, is of such a kind as calls for all the assistance, which the friends of religion can give you. And yet affecting as it is, you should take heed that your grief exceeds not due bounds, and that you indulge not an unkind or unworthy thought of God. *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord* a. It will be happy, if what you have heard may have the desired effect to raise your hearts to heaven, and to incline you to submit patiently to the will of God: and if what I have yet to say concerning our dear departed friend, instead of aggravating your sorrows, may prove the means of soothing them, and exciting us all to a proper imitation of his example.

The memory of the just is blessed b: and there seems special occasion for taking some notice of the characters, tempers and conduct of such, who, by reason of their stations in life, have been more generally known than others; and who, by the grace of God, have been enabled to discharge themselves worthily, in the important and painful work of the Christian ministry. It is a tribute we owe to their memory, and which we should be the rather inclined to pay, as thereby somewhat may be contributed to our own comfort and edification. I need therefore make no farther apology for what follows.

Mr. Burford was greatly indebted to the providence and grace of God for many advantages, which enabled him to fill up the character he sustained among you, with reputation, comfort and success. He was a man of strong natural parts; he had a lively imagination, a retentive memory, an agreeable voice, and a pleasing elocution. His natural temper was sweet, affectionate and cheerful. But what rendered him most amiable and useful was, that real concern for religion, accom-

a Job i. 21. b Prov. x. 7.

panied with Christian candour and modesty, which possessed his heart, governed his conduct, and put life into his public ministrations.

It was in early life, I think when about eighteen or nineteen, he made a public profession of religion. And having spent some time in study with a view to the ministry, he appeared in it with general approbation. After the decease of your former pastor, the Rev. Mr. Wilson, whose memory is I doubt not still precious among you, he was invited to take upon him the charge of this church. With what diffidence of himself he accepted this invitation, and with what concern to discharge his duty faithfully in this important station, I well remember. To his work he applied himself with assiduity and zeal; and as he felt a sincere affection for you, and discovered it on all occasions, weeping with them that wept, and rejoicing with them that rejoiced; so he had the happiness in return to receive warm expressions of regard and love from you. Nor was this his only happiness; for as his abilities which were popular improved, so he and you had the still greater pleasure of seeing the success of his labours, in the addition of many to this community, who will I trust be *the crown of his rejoicing in the day of the Lord a.*

Need I put you in mind, my friends, of the proofs he gave of his ardent concern, not for your temporal prosperity only, but most of all for your spiritual and everlasting welfare?—how faithfully he dispensed the word of truth among you, *by the terrors of the Lord persuading* the stupid thoughtless sinner *b*, and by the mercy and grace of the gospel encouraging the sincere and humble inquirer?—how he instructed the ignorant, and warned the presumptuous?—*how he exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you (as a father doth his children) that he would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory c?* Need I remind you, with what fluency, affection and fervour, he usually poured out his prayers to God among you and for you? Or need I tell you, how he exemplified the doctrine he preached, so far as consists with human frailty, in the general course of his life; conduct-

a 1 Thess. ii. 19. *b* 2 Cor. v. 11. *c* 1 Thess. ii. 11, 12.

ing the affairs of his family with prudence and frugality, attending diligently and regularly on the duties of his public ministry, and carrying himself, in all his familiar intercourses at your houses, with seriousness and cheerfulness? *Ye are his witnesses*, I think I may say, *how holily and justly and unblameably he behaved himself among you a.*

But he is now no more—no more as to this world. Mysterious providence! We are sure it is right, but we know not how to explain it. A great variety of circumstances would have led us to apprehend, that his continuance among us, which was the voice of nature and the earnest wish of his friends, might also be the will of Providence. *But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, nor his ways our ways b.* The divine purpose was not to be altered. Neither early life, nor growing usefulness, nor the tears of a numerous family, nor the prayers of his Christian friends, such of them as apprehended his danger, nor the aid of skilful physicians, could prevail to get the sentence that was gone forth reversed, or even postponed. Death made his advances upon him suddenly, giving either us or him but little notice of his approach. A few days pulled down a constitution, which had the appearance of health and vigour; and so rapid and secret was the progress of the disease, that the foundation of the house was mined and nearly destroyed, before the danger of its fall was well apprehended.

During this short time he felt great pain, which he nevertheless bore with becoming patience and fortitude. It was his desire for the sake of his family and his people, if it were the will of God, that he might still live; and with some degree of earnestness he prayed for a blessing on the means used to that end; adding, "That God was yet able to raise him up." But it was otherwise determined. On the day preceding his death, a veil was drawn over his mind; so that he had discouraging doubts and temptations to contend with, as well as the pains of his increasing disease. "He feared, he said, that God was dealing with him in wrath, and that he was an unprofitable servant;" adding, "that he could not now see that

a 1 Thess. ii. 10. b Isa. lv. 8.

God had made a covenant with him, as he formerly thought he had seen." But on the following day, the day of his dissolution, the cloud dispersed; and there succeeded to it a happy composure and tranquillity of mind. "He saw, as he expressed it, that God had loved him with an everlasting love, and that he was now with loving-kindness drawing him to himself *a*." And with pleasure he repeated those words of the psalmist, *This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him; and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him b.* Death now approached him; and perceiving his departure at hand, he said to those around him, "My people are dear to me, and I believe they love me. My family and wife, and all I must leave in the hands of God. I am going to the arms of Jesus"—and so he expired.

Thus lived, and thus died this amiable and worthy man, this sincere Christian and faithful servant of God. And now what remains, but that we make a suitable improvement of this awakening and instructive providence? There is a loud voice in it to his family, to his people, to his brethren in the ministry, to his friends, to all that knew him.

As to his family; we cannot cast our eyes upon an afflicted widow, surrounded with a large company of young and helpless children, lamenting the loss of an indulgent husband, and a tender and affectionate parent, without feeling strong emotions of sympathy and grief. The Saviour were he on earth, would I doubt not upon such an occasion as this weep. Hear their sad, their sorrowful language—*Have pity upon us, have pity upon us, O ye our friends, for the hand of God hath touched us c.* Did I say, Hear it?—You have heard it, you have felt it. And I must mention it, as one very alleviating circumstance under this severe stroke, and to the great honour of you my friends of this church and others, that you have generously, and with a spirit becoming the disciples of the compassionate Jesus, entered into measures for their relief and support. They feel, I persuade myself, grateful resentments of your

a Jer. xxxi. 3. *b* Psal. xxxiv. 6—8. *c* Job xix. 21.

kindness, good men applaud you, and God will I doubt not reward you.

May the sorrowful heart of the widow be sustained with divine consolations, in this the day of her distress. Let me remind you, that great as your loss is, you are not left desolate; for your Maker is your judge, your friend, and your husband *a*. Put your trust in him, and be assured, 'he will never leave you nor forsake you *b*.' As to you, the tender offspring of the deceased, my bowels yearn over you. Your early age, the temptations to which you stand exposed, and the dangers of various kinds which await you, and which have befallen many families that have risen into life in these fatherless circumstances, are considerations that call for our fervent prayers on your behalf. May God of his infinite mercy keep you! To his providence and grace we affectionately commend you. It was no small comfort to your dear parent who is gone, that one of you was to have devoted himself to God in this church this month. O may you be all found walking in the ways of religion! Call to mind his admonitions and counsels, his example and prayers. 'Remember your Creator in the days of your youth *c*.' Be dutiful to your surviving parent; and be attentive to the instructions of those, who have generously taken you under their protection, and humanely consider you as their children.

With you my friends of this church I tenderly sympathize in this deep affliction. You feel it; but let not your sorrow exceed. It is the will of God, and it is your duty therefore to submit patiently to it. Be thankful that this sad stroke was not given, before the wounds you felt for your former loss were well healed. Eighteen or nineteen years I think he spent in the ministry, and about thirteen among you. Permit me to exhort you to frequent and fervent prayer to God, that his chastening hand may be sanctified, that you may have divine wisdom to guide you in all the steps you take, and that this breach may be quickly and happily repaired. Be faithful regular and serious in your attendance on the worship of God. Let this affliction tend to cement your hearts still more and more to one

a Psal. lxviii. 5.—Isa. liv. 5. *b* Heb. xiii. 5. *c* Eccl. xii. 1.

another. And consider the words of the apostle, as the language of your minister, 'Finally brethren, farewell: be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you *a*.'

This awakening dispensation should have its due effect also on those of us, who are engaged in the arduous work of the ministry, to quicken us to our duty, and to unite us to each other. He hath left us behind in the same warfare, the same service wherein he was employed, and the rewards of which he is now reaping. The difficulties and labours of it are many; nor can we help wishing our souls in his stead who is gone—wishing ourselves with him where he is, and where all pain, uneasiness and sorrow, all weakness, imperfection and sin are for ever done away. We are however commanded 'to go our way, and stand in our lot till our end is *b*.' O may his spirit descend upon us; and having finished our course, as he finished his, may we also receive a crown of glory!

To draw to a close. What a loud voice is there in this providence to us all! *Be ye also ready; for ye know not in what hour the Son of man cometh c.* Would to God that the voice may be heard by those of you, who have long sat under the awakening ministry of my deceased brother, but still remain in your sins! Let me intreat you, by the mercies of God, by the compassion you owe to your own precious and immortal souls, and by the regard that is due to the memory of him, whose face you will no more see in the flesh, seriously to reflect on the many lively and affectionate addresses, made to you from the place where I now stand. How often and how faithfully have you been warned of your misery and danger! And with what earnestness and affection have you been entreated to *flee from the wrath to come d*, and *to lay hold on the hope set before us* in the gospel *e*! Think of these things; and realize that great and awful day when, if you shall be found to have remained impenitent, he shall be a swift witness against you. May God grant, that the same power which raised Lazarus from his grave, may so accompany this striking providence, as

a 2 Cor. xiii. 11. *b* Dan. xii. 13. *c* Matt. xxiv. 44.
d Matt. iii. 7. *e* Heb. vi. 18.

to render it the effectual means of your resurrection from a death of sin, to a life of righteousness and new obedience!

In one word, may this affecting instance of mortality have its proper influence on all our minds, to quicken us to that circumspection, diligence and vigour, which the shortness and uncertainty of life, and our infinite obligations to the grace of God, most reasonably demand! Let us work while it is called to-day, remembering that *the night cometh when no man can work a!* And *having served our generation by the will of God, may we fall asleep in Jesus b*, and *have an abundant entrance ministered to us into the kingdom of the Lord c!*

a John ix. 4. b Acts xiii. 36. c 2 Pet. i. 11.

A

SERMON

PREACHED

AT THE ORDINATION

OF THE

REV. MR. ABRAHAM BOOTH:

IN GOODMAN'S FIELDS, FEB. 16th, 1769.

A

SERMON, &c.

To explain and enforce the duties a people owe to their minister, is the service which you, my friends of this church, have requested of me. It is, I am sensible, a service attended with no small difficulty; as some kind of partiality may be supposed to mingle itself with addresses usual on these occasions. Labouring, however, to divest myself of all undue prejudices in favour of the office I sustain, and presuming on your candour and friendship, I shall without any further apology proceed.

The interest of religion, and of consequence the welfare not only of individuals but of society in general, is the professed object of the Christian ministry. And as it is by this truly noble and important end I would be guided, in prosecuting the subject before me; it may not be improper to accommodate the words of the sacred historian to our present purpose, which are recorded in

2 CHRON. XXX. 22.—*And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord*——.

I MEAN not by this accommodation to enter into a particular comparison of the Jewish with the Christian dispensation; much less to draw any absurd inference from thence in favour of what has been called, arrogantly by some and as contemptuously by others, the priesthood. No. What I mean, is to take occasion from the pious zeal which Hezekiah and other good men in those days expressed for the interest of religion, to animate you, my friends, to such a cheerful and hearty concurrence with your minister in the discharge of his office, as may happily tend, with the blessing of God, to the same important end.

The event to which the text refers makes no inconsiderable figure in the history of the kings of Judah. Ahaz, the immediate predecessor of Hezekiah, was a profane and wicked prince. He forsook God, disgraced his worship, established idolatry by law, and introduced among his people the vilest practices of the heathen nations. So that when Hezekiah came to the throne, he found the affairs of his country in miserable disorder, and very justly apprehended the most tremendous consequences. His heart, however, being right with God, he immediately sets about a reformation. The first thing he does, is to open the doors of the house of the Lord, to remove thence the abominations which Ahaz had brought into it, and to restore the worship of God to its original state. This done, he goes up thither with the princes and the rulers of the city, and there offers solemn sacrifice to make atonement for all Israel; which is followed with a prodigious number of burnt-offerings from the whole congregation. Upon this occasion it is remarked, that the Levites were more forward in the service of God than the priests: so that these not having all sanctified themselves so early as they should have done, the others were obliged to help their brethren the priests, till the work was ended. There might, in point of form, be some irregularity in this; but the necessity of the case was a sufficient excuse. And indeed the zeal which the Levites thus expressed for the true religion, reflected no small honour on their character.—So was this first service closed, and so was the temple, which had been defiled and prostituted to idolatry, again dedicated to the worship of the living God. Nor was the pleasure small which the king and the people felt on this occasion; for the matter was of God who had prepared their hearts, and it was done suddenly *a*.

The next thing good Hezekiah resolves upon, is to celebrate the feast of passover. And in order to make it the more general and solemn, he not only issues a proclamation requiring his own subjects to attend; but he sends letters to Ephraim and Manasseh, inviting all the people of Israel to come up to Jerusalem on this occasion. It was a service to which they

a 2 Chron. xxix. 36.

were all obliged by the law of Moses; though alas! it had been neglected for a long time. But, notwithstanding the pious expostulations and earnest entreaties of Hezekiah and his princes, great numbers of the Israelites treated the message with contempt. Some however of the ten tribes, and all the people of Judah, were obedient to the king's command. And being assembled at Jerusalem, a very great congregation, they first removed the idolatrous altars which had been set up in the city; and then kept the feast with a solemnity that had not been known since the time of Solomon. Now upon this occasion, the text tells us, *Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the Lord.*

The Levites, strictly speaking, were all those who descended from Levi, priests as well as others. But the character is most commonly applied in Scripture to one part of that tribe only, by way of distinction from the priesthood. The priests were of a superior, and the Levites of an inferior order. The business of the former was to sacrifice, and to perform the more solemn and sacred parts of public worship; and of the latter to assist the priests in their office, and to take care of the temple, and of the furniture and treasure that belonged to it. Now the Levites were the persons for whom Hezekiah expressed a special regard on this occasion; not out of any indifference to the priesthood, but because these, as we have seen, were more forward to the service of God than the others. He paid a due respect to the ministers of the temple according to the rank they held there, and out of regard to the divine appointment: but his respects were chiefly influenced and guided by the zeal, faithfulness and diligence, with which each one discharged the duties of his office.

One important branch of their duty is particularly mentioned, as a ground of his esteem and affection for these Levites. *They taught the good knowledge of the Lord*—the knowledge of the one living and true God, and of his will as revealed by Moses and the prophets—all the great doctrines and duties of religion, so far as they were discoverable under that dark and imperfect dispensation. A knowledge this of all others most excellent and useful: adapted *to enlighten the eyes, convert the*

soul, and *rejoice the heart a*; to make men wiser, better and happier. And a knowledge which they stood in the greater need of being instructed in, as so much ignorance, superstition and idolatry had lately prevailed among them. This was the proper business of the priests and Levites. They were qualified for it, and appointed to it. Moses had solemnly enjoined this duty upon them, and had mentioned it at his death, among the honours and privileges peculiar to that tribe. *They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law b.* And however they might many of them have neglected their duty in times past, it seems they now very generally betook themselves to it with great cheerfulness, diligence and faithfulness.

Wherefore Hezekiah, in his great zeal for religion, and his tender concern for the welfare of his people, *spake comfortably to the Levites.* He esteemed them very highly in love for their work's sake. He did them that honour to which their office, and their care to fulfil the duties of it, justly intitled them. Knowing the difficulties they had to contend with, he pitied, comforted and encouraged them. He spake *to* their *heart*—used his utmost endeavours to cheer, revive, quicken and animate them. *My son*, says he, with the greatest tenderness and familiarity, *be not now negligent: for the Lord hath chosen you to stand before him, to serve him c.* "It is your peculiar honour to be the servants of the living God, and to minister to him in his temple. Be not you therefore remiss in your duty, but be faithful to him who has appointed you, as also Moses was faithful in all his house." Nor did he content himself with speaking thus kindly to them. He gave them all the countenance, support and assistance in their work they could reasonably desire. He himself, his princes, and his household, attended their preaching and their other ministrations—attended them with seriousness, cheerfulness and constancy. He commended their diligence, and by speaking well of them, of their office, and of their labours for the public good, he conciliated the minds of the people in general to the observance of religious worship. Nay what was more than this, and what afforded the greatest comfort and encouragement

a Psal. xix. 7, 8. b Deut. xxxiii. 10. c Chap. xxix. 11.

to the pious Levites, was, the honour which his temper and example reflected upon those instructions, he from time to time received in common with others in the house of God. To all which I might add, that Hezekiah further expressed his regard for these ministers of religion, by taking care to secure to them such maintenance and support, as God in his infinite wisdom and goodness had appointed. *He commanded the people that dwelt in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might be encouraged in the law of the Lord a.* To which command, we are afterwards told, the people in general rendered a cheerful obedience.

Thus have we seen the measures which Hezekiah took for the assistance and encouragement of the Levites in the discharge of their office; and what were the truly noble considerations, by which he was influenced in exerting himself on their behalf. He did not act merely from a principle of humanity, or even equity, but from a real concern also for the honour of God, and for the welfare of his people. And thus have we seen how readily the people concurred with him in these measures, for the restoration of the true religion to the state it had been in, in former times.

And now from hence I am naturally led to what is the principal object of this discourse. We indeed are under a very different dispensation of religion from that of the Jews. The pomp and ceremony which attended their worship is entirely laid aside, the end of those institutions having been fully answered; and God is now to be worshipped after a plain, simple and spiritual manner. Yet as religion itself is the same it was then, we are under the same obligations to regard the external means of it, as the Jews were, though these means are of quite another kind. If therefore we are to meet together at stated seasons for prayer and praise, instruction and reproof, and the celebration of baptism and the Lord's supper; if to these purposes we are to choose persons properly qualified to teach us the good knowledge of the Lord, and to administer to us holy ordinances; and if a company of faithful people thus assembled, however small their number, is a church of

a Chap. xxxi. 4.

Christ, and established by divine appointment;—then it is unquestionably the duty of such a people, after the example of Hezekiah and the pious Jews, to do the utmost that lies in their power to support, assist and encourage their ministers, in the due discharge of their office. The duty is as binding in the latter instance as in the former. The ends are the same, the honour of God and the spread of religion; and the means, though different, are instituted by the same authority. Wherefore *our* obligations to shew a proper regard to those who are to take the lead in the worship of God, are the same, precisely the same, as were *theirs*.

But detaching myself from this comparative view of the matter, I propose now to consider more particularly,

I. The grounds of that regard which is due from a people towards their minister;

II. The several ways in which it should express itself; and

III. Some additional motives, besides those which arise out of the nature of the duty itself, to excite us to it.

I. As to the grounds of the several duties I have to recommend, these are proper to be laid down first, as the right understanding them will the better enable me to point out the duties themselves. Now here are to be considered the claims they have upon us—in common with others, as men and Christians—in virtue of their character and office, as ministers of Christ—and in consequence of the proper and faithful discharge of their duty.

1. They have a claim upon us as men and Christians, in common with others. Their public character does by no means vacate or annul their private or civil character.

This I mention with a view to guard against two mistakes, which though very absurd are, I am sorry to say it, not uncommon. The one is that of refusing them such a decent regard, as is their due upon considerations of a natural and civil kind. And the other is that of paying them an extravagant and superstitious sort of respect, as if they were of a rank superior to that of their fellow-creatures and fellow-Christians. The former is the mistake of those who have but slight, if not contemptuous, notions of religion. And the latter theirs, who

though they may have great zeal for religion, yet have little or no knowledge or prudence mingled with that zeal. And they are each of them highly unreasonable and injurious.

If ministers have the same sense, honesty and piety as others, they may on these considerations justly challenge the same esteem, attention and affection as others. Nor is there any reason why their personal merit (I speak in regard of men not of God) should suffer any diminution from their public and relative character.—And on the other hand, if they are men subject to the like passions, weaknesses and infirmities with others, as they most certainly are, this consideration ought to have its due effect, to check and restrain those violent and enthusiastic regards, which some weak and foolish persons are apt to express towards them. For however their station and usefulness would induce a good man to put the most charitable construction upon their defects and failings; yet a total inattention to them, when it produces such prejudices in their favour as were just mentioned, is on many accounts very unreasonable and dangerous. Whilst we treat them as if they were more than men, we are in a disposition to place an implicit, and so a very hurtful confidence in them; and by feeding their pride and vanity we greatly injure them and obstruct their usefulness. And after a while, when we come to discover their mistakes and imperfections, it is much but our over-weening affection for them as hastily subsides, as it was before suddenly excited and inflamed.

So that the considering ministers as men and Christians in common with others, that is, the duly estimating their natural and religious qualifications, and their passions, weaknesses and prejudices, is a matter of no small importance in order to the regulation of our regards towards them. There is no wise and faithful minister, I am persuaded, but would on the one hand be glad to be thought a sensible, honest and good man; and would on the other from his heart despise that ignorant kind of respect, which is offered to supposed infallibility and perfection. Even the apostles themselves, though they were willing to suffer reproach and persecution for the sake of religion, on every proper occasion, boldly asserted their rights as men

and Christians. And on the contrary, though they were inspired of God, and endowed with a power of working miracles, they were on no occasion backward to acknowledge, that they were *men of like passions with others a*, and that it was *in earthen vessels* God had put the treasure of his gospel, *that the excellency of the power might be of him and not of them b.*

——The next thing to be considered, as a farther ground of the duties which the people owe to them, is,

2. Their characters and office as ministers of Christ. This is a matter of no small consequence to be rightly understood, because of the contempt with which it is treated by some, and because of the extravagant and superstitious veneration that is paid to it by others.

The office then is not of political invention, no nor an institution merely of wise and good men; but it is, I will be bold to affirm, of divine appointment. This I think every one who believes his Bible must acknowledge. For the commission our Lord gave to the first ministers of the gospel to go teach all nations, to administer the ordinances to them that should believe and be converted, and to instruct them in whatever he had commanded; this commission was to extend to the most distant ages, as clearly appears from the promise annexed, that *he would be with them alway even to the end of the world c.* And the apostle tells us, our Lord has appointed ministers in his church *for the edifying of the body of Christ, till it should come to a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ d.* Such ministers (who are described as evangelists or teachers, and as bishops or pastors) were fixed in the churches that were first raised and established: and a succession of them was to be continued as long as the Christian church should exist.

The question then is, Who they are that have a claim to the office of a bishop, or overseer, and what are the duties of such office? And here we are to be guided by Scripture, and by the reason and the nature of the thing. It is not every one who assumes that venerable character, or who has it given

a Acts xiv. 15. *b* 2 Cor. iv. 7.
c Matt. xxviii. 19, 20. *d* Eph. iv. 11—13.

him by others, that is really intitled to it. He must be properly qualified for it—he must be regularly called to it—and he must be duly invested with it.

As to the qualifications of a Christian bishop; they are not only clearly laid down in Scripture, but they are such as approve themselves to every one's understanding and reason. He ought to have a fair character, to be a good man, and a real believer in Christ. He ought to have a competent knowledge in divine things, and an aptness to communicate that knowledge to others. And he ought to be influenced in taking upon him this sacred office, not by secular motives, but by a sincere desire to glorify God, and to do good to the souls of men. Now all these qualifications are from God. Wherefore he who is of an immoral life, or is governed by sinister and worldly views, be his pretences what they may, has no right to the character of a minister of Christ, or to be acknowledged as such by others. Nor is there a sober, thoughtful man, who reflects that the gifts of inspiration and of miracles are now ceased, but will I think readily admit, that every kind of knowledge which is to be obtained by study, reading, self-acquaintance, and conversation, especially that which qualifies a person to explain the Scriptures, to defend its doctrines, to recommend its duties, and to address the hearts and consciences of men, is of great importance to a minister. So that they who hold such advantages as these in contempt, know not what they speak, or whereof they affirm. Again,

He is to be regularly called to the office. As to the admission of a person into the ministry, Scripture is not so particular upon that matter as upon others. Yet we are not without a rule—a rule which common sense teaches, and which, though the New Testament may not have expressed in so many words, naturally enough follows from other matters clearly laid down there. Every Christian community has a right to restrain its members from a disorderly behaviour. That of persons taking upon them, of their own heads to be teachers of others, is a scandalous and notorious breach of decency and order. Wherefore it properly falls under the cognizance of the particular church to which such persons be-

long. And if any difficulty arises in judging of any one's talents for public usefulness; as it ought to be the subject of mature consideration, accompanied with prayer, so prudence and a concern for the honour of religion will naturally induce a society of serious Christians to call in the aid of those, who may be capable of advising in so weighty an affair. And if this method were duly attended to, in the fear of God, it would prevent a great deal of that reproach, which the conceit and ignorance of some forward persons, to say no worse, has brought upon the interest of Christ.—But as to the office of a pastor or bishop of a particular church, it is the clear and indubitable right of the people, upon the soundest principles both of reason and religion, to judge and determine for themselves upon that matter.

And then as to his investiture with that office, or his ordination to it; the form you have now seen observed, and have heard explained, appears to me to have been the original practice: and there are manifest advantages attending such a solemnity as this, which I forbear to enumerate, as the subject would lead me too far from the main intent of this discourse.

And now the character and office of a minister having been thus delineated from the word of God, I have neither time, nor is there necessity for me, particularly to describe the several duties of it. You have already heard them very largely explained, and very affectionately recommended. He is to teach the good knowledge of the Lord, to administer ordinances, to preside in the affairs of the church, and to labour according to his abilities to promote the spiritual and everlasting interests of those committed to his care.

If then this office is of divine appointment, if God of his grace qualifies men for it, and calls them to it, and if the duties of it are truly honourable, arduous and important; there is certainly some regard due to it—a regard not founded in whim or imagination, no nor merely in the extravagant claims of men of vain and assuming tempers; but in reason, in religion, in the plain dictates of God's holy word. I have therefore only to observe (and which will correct what has been said, if I have at all expressed myself too strongly on these matters)

3. That it is a regard due only to such, whose concern it is faithfully to discharge the duties of their office.

It is not an office instituted for the support or emolument of a particular order of men, or for the gratification of any passion of theirs for honour or applause. The reverse appears upon the very face of it. It is the wise and gracious appointment of heaven for purposes of the greatest utility and importance; for the rescuing the immortal souls of men from the most tremendous miseries both in this life and that which is to come, and for the training them up for the participation of the noblest and most substantial honours and enjoyments. If therefore he who calls himself a minister of Christ loses sight of these great objects, neglects the painful labours of study and reading, indulges himself in ease, sloth and pride, wastes his time about secular pursuits and amusements, or in idle and fruitless visits; if he wantonly busies himself in other men's concerns, and if, instead of setting an example of gravity, meekness, patience, temperance and charity, he disgraces his character by mean and base compliances, and a vain, carnal, self-interested temper; if he thus puts off the very appearance of a minister of the meek and lowly Jesus, and assumes that of a man of the world:—it is not to be wondered that he loses the esteem, regard and affection of those around him. But if the contrary is the case, he may challenge the love, I will add, the veneration of his people and of all good men. Or if he does not challenge it, which indeed he hardly will, it is his due.——And so I am led

II. To point out the several ways in which the regard that is owing to the ministers of Christ ought to express itself.

The grand thing is, the having a real, cordial, prevailing affection for them; an affection springing not merely from natural or civil considerations, but from principles of a more noble, refined and exalted nature, even those of religion; an affection founded in the gospel of Christ, and cherished and improved by the mighty effect of it on our hearts through the grace of God.—The loving them as believing them to be men who truly fear God, to be such whom he has appointed to shew us the way of salvation, and who, amidst all their infirmities,

sincerely aim at serving our most essential and important interests. If we thus love them, we shall scarcely fail to give them such proofs of our love, as will directly tend to assist and animate them in their work; which should ever be the grand end and the principal measure of all the regards we pay them. This kind of affection I doubt not prevails in your breasts, my friends, towards my brother whom you have this day called to be your minister and elder. Bear with me therefore, while I lay before you those natural and scriptural expressions of it, which he may reasonably expect, and which I make no question he will cheerfully and gratefully acknowledge. They are such as respect his person—his character—and his ministrations.

1. As to his person.

In general, let it be your object to make him as happy as you possibly can.—To this end be acquainted with him. *Know them*, says the apostle, *which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you a.* Neither your nor his concerns will allow you to be continually in each other's company. Yet a friendly intercourse, at proper seasons, should be sought and cultivated: and reserve on your part may occasion shyness on his.—Carry it decently and respectfully towards him. Rudeness and incivility, under the pretence of plainness and honesty is very nearly as inexcusable; as adulation and flattery, under the mask of good-nature and friendship. *The elder who rules well, and who labours in the word and doctrine, should be counted worthy of double honour b*; and *such should be held in reputation c.* Be therefore courteous and obliging in your carriage towards him.—Nor let a concern to shew respect preclude freedom and familiarity. The greatest frankness and openness ought to subsist among friends. And surely you should consider your minister as your friend. I mean not that you are to lay open your worldly affairs to him. The less he knows of them the better. He has other things to mind. In matters of religion however he is entitled to a greater freedom of inquiry than others. *Submit yourselves to them, for they watch for your souls d.* Nor do I even here mean such a

a 1 Thess. v. 12, 13. *b* 2 Tim. v. 17. *c* Phil. ii. 29.

base submission as is practised in the church of Rome, and which has been fruitful of innumerable mischiefs; but only a cheerful readiness on your part to consult him in a friendly manner on your best interests. I speak of particular and extraordinary difficulties; for his work would be endless, were every individual to expect a solution of questions in private, which may be satisfactorily determined by an attendance on the public means of religion. But the familiarity I mean here to recommend, is such a free and open carriage, as may tend to secure his esteem and confidence, and so to promote his comfort and happiness. By your very countenance, gesture and manner, express the cordial affection you feel for him. *Speak comfortably to him*, as Hezekiah did to the Levites. Bid him welcome to your houses, and think yourselves happy in his company.—Consult his temper, and make all proper allowances for his failings. Consider the variety and extensiveness of his work, and construe not every omission of respect or duty into a want of real affection and regard.—When faithfulness obliges you to remind him of some mistake or neglect, do it with prudence and gentleness. Avoid every thing, both as individuals and as a church, which may tend to grieve and distress him, to perplex his mind or break his spirits. Many occasions of sorrow and trouble in the usual course of things will arise, in which he must necessarily have a principal share: make him not therefore a party in *every* dispute, nor let him be privy to every private offence or personal altercation.—And now I speak of affliction, let me entreat you to sympathize with him in his sorrows, be they what they may. He who exhorted the Galatians *to bear one another's burdens* [a], did not mean to exclude their ministers from the benefit of his tender admonition. No. They perhaps of all others need it most. Is he therefore oppressed with grief? pity him, visit him, counsel him, comfort him. Do that kind office by him in private, which he is from week to week attempting towards you in public. The kindness will be returned, it will be amply rewarded.—In a word, as a farther expression of your love, and your concern for his happiness, provide him an honourable maintenance; such an one

[a] Heb. xiii. 17. [b] Gal. vi. 2.

as will free him from anxious cares, and not only set him above the frowns of the world, but enable him to gratify the charitable disposition of his heart.—The reasonableness and equity of this, where there is ability, and the express injunctions of Scripture *a* upon the matter, you well understand. And indeed such has been your forwardness herein, in times past, that it would seem strange to most who hear me, were I any farther to press it upon you.—I go on now to the regard you owe,

2. To his character; by which I mean his reputation for morality, piety, and ministerial abilities.

As to his *moral* character, the maintenance of it is of the last importance to his usefulness. For to what purpose does a man take upon him to instruct others in matters of religion, who is destitute of a principle of honesty, and leads a loose and profligate life? But it is not the thing itself I here mean. That depends on his own care and attention; and for any failure therein he alone is answerable both to God and man. But what I mean is his *reputation* for virtue and sobriety. That may suffer, notwithstanding the utmost caution and circumspection on his part, through the malice of wicked men, and the imprudence and folly of his own friends. It is therefore your indispensable duty to assert, maintain and defend his character to the utmost of your power. Zeal in this case is a debt you owe to yourselves, as well as to him. Take heed then how you admit even a suspicion in your breasts of any thing dishonourable to him. And so far from countenancing any insinuations that have an ill tendency, satisfied of their untruth, use your utmost endeavours to vindicate *him* and suppress *them*. The apostle was so sensible of the importance of this, that he charges the people *not to receive an accusation against an elder, but before two or three witnesses b*. And yet, if ministers do really act unworthy of their character; to defend them is a crime instead of a virtue, an affront to religion instead of a recommendation of it.

There are duties you owe also to his character for *piety*, as well as morality. Religion is I know a personal thing, a mat-

a 1 Cor. ix. 4—14. *b* 1 Tim. v. 19.

ter which lies between God and a man's own soul. Yet there are certain external expressions of it which are fit and natural, and which can scarcely escape the observation of those with whom we converse. Wherefore we ought all to watch against the charge of affectation and severity on the one hand, and of lightness and dissipation on the other. But ministers, as they are in public stations, and are under special obligations to exert themselves for the promoting religion; are more liable to misapprehensions and reflections of this sort, than private Christians. Very becoming expressions of zeal on their part will sometimes be censured as the effect of preciseness and singularity: and then again a commendable cheerfulness and affability will by some weak persons be hastily considered as an unhappy sign of a declension in religion. As therefore they ought to be careful that they give no just cause of offence to their people; so their people ought to exercise great candour, forbearance and tenderness in these matters towards them.—Cherish therefore in your breasts a most cordial and affectionate opinion of your minister as a real Christian, and as one who has your everlasting interests much at heart. Do not misinterpret any measures he may pursue, with a professed view to the promoting your good, as the effect of ill motives or an unworthy principle. Even though his zeal were to get the better of his judgment, rather than improperly check it, love him the better for it. And though his reproofs should happen in some instances to be rather warm and severe, consider them as the overflowings of an honest concern for your welfare, and not of peevishness or ill-temper.—And on the other hand, let not his laudable endeavours to improve in the knowledge of men and things, let not his proper relaxations from study and labour, no nor let every little circumstance of decent cheerfulness and pleasantry, be construed into an indifference to religion, or to the duties of his station. Believe him to be a good man, and do him the justice to speak of him, and commend him, and to honour him as such.—And then again,

As to his ministerial *abilities*. You have tried them, you have approved them, and you have chosen him as one happily qualified to teach you the good knowledge of the Lord. It is

of importance that you are confirmed in your opinion of his gifts, nay that you are prejudiced in favour of them. A bigotted and unmeaning attachment to particular ministers, especially when it betrays a people into injurious and disrespectful comparisons, is a reflection both on such a people's understanding and seriousness. This was what the apostle condemned in the Corinthians. Yet, if either Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas had been their stated minister, it would have been perhaps not only excusable but commendable in them to have been *for him* rather than for others, that is, to have given the preference to his gifts above theirs. In this respect therefore think well of him, speak well of him. Be assisting to his improvements in knowledge. Stir up the gift that is in him. And, by seasonable commendations of him, contribute what in you lies towards his acceptableness, and of consequence his usefulness.—And thus I am led to the principal thing, which is,

3. The duty you owe to his *ministrations.*

And here let me observe in general, that that which I make no doubt is *his* grand object should be *yours* also, and that you should heartily concur with him in promoting it: I mean the support, defence and spread of the gospel, the conversion and salvation of immortal souls, and the diffusion of light, purity and happiness among all around you. *Contend earnestly* therefore *for the faith which was once delivered to the saints a,* and *provoke* one another *to love and good works b.* Do your utmost to maintain truth, holiness, order and peace among yourselves; and strive which shall excel the other in meekness, humility, charity and all the fruits of real piety. These will be the most substantial proofs of your regard to his ministrations, will afford him the most effectual support and encouragement in the discharge of his work, and will reflect the greatest honour on yourselves. But to be more particular——

He is *to teach the good knowledge of the Lord.* Be diligent therefore, faithful and regular in your attendance on public worship. Let not every little trifling excuse, either of weather or bodily indisposition, keep you from the house of God. Go up thither early, at the hour of prayer. Take your children

a Jude 3. *b* Heb. x. 24.

and your servants with you, and use your best endeavours to persuade others to accompany you. Let your earnest cries to Heaven, both for your minister and yourselves, precede and follow every returning exercise of religion. Join, not in the form only, but in the spirit of public prayer. Listen attentively, candidly, and affectionately to what is said to you. Receive the truth in the love of it. When any thing drops from the speaker in a way of reproof, which is particularly applicable to your circumstances, do not admit the invidious suspicion that any personal reflection was intended. When you are not so entertained and profited as you could wish, lay not all the blame on the preacher, but in charity to him, take a part of it upon yourselves. Make all proper allowance for the different kinds of subjects and occasions of his discourses, and for the different frames and tempers of mind to which he is liable as well as you. Do not hear him as critics but as Christians; not as those who come to be amused, but to be saved. Regard not the neatness or accuracy of his compositions; but the reasoning, spirit and intent of them. Treasure up what you hear in your memories. Compare it with Scripture, and give no farther credit to it, than as it is conformable to that grand standard of truth; and if it be agreeable to it, reject it at your peril. Watch against the very pernicious practice of mingling with vain and trifling company after the exercises of public devotion. And allow me to add, that a regular attention to the duties of the family, on the evening of the day devoted to divine service, is a very important means of religion,—a means of religion that is I am afraid in general, on one pretence or other, very much neglected. *Give earnest heed to the things you hear, lest at any time you let them slip a;* and be not *like* those who *behold* their *faces in a glass, and go away, and instantly forget what manner of persons* they are *b.* Prayer, fervent prayer, I would again most earnestly press upon you, as a lively and indeed a necessary expression of your improvement in religion. And if that be duly practised, it need not be questioned that the happiest effects of your attendance on public worship will be seen the whole week afterwards.

a Heb. ii. 1. *b* James i. 23, 24.

Be persuaded also to a serious, regular and cheerful participation of the Lord's supper. *Do this in remembrance of me a*, says Christ. Reflect on your obligations to the infinitely adorable Jesus; and if you love him, you cannot easily satisfy yourselves in the neglect of this sacred precept. Beware of the too common excuse of the want of due preparation. That will be your own fault. See to it therefore that one neglect is not made an excuse for another. And then as to the offences of any who may partake with you, do your duty, and remember that you are not chargeable with what is amiss in them.

Give me leave also to remind you of the duties incumbent on you, in regard of the peace, order, purity and love, which should subsist among you as a church of Christ. Do your utmost to discountenance all vice and sin under the mask of a Christian profession. Take every prudent, and at the same time vigorous, measure to come at the truth in matters of public scandal. Let firmness be mingled with meekness, and impartiality with charity. Stand by your minister in the due discharge of his office, and concur heartily with him in every expedient proposed for the honour of religion, and your mutual good as a Christian community. Be united among yourselves. *Let all your things be done with charity b.* And *putting away all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, with all malice; be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you c.*

To all which I have only to add the great importance of social prayer. Exercises of this sort, properly conducted and well attended, will have a happy tendency, not only to promote the spirit of religion in general, but to comfort the heart of your minister, and to strengthen his hands in his work.

Having thus with great freedom laid before you, my friends, your duty, give me leave,

III. By some suitable motives to enforce it.

And here, What one passion is there of the human heart—What one divine principle or affection of the renewed mind—but I might with reason address? The arguments I have to

a 1 Cor. xi. 24. *b* 1 Cor. xvi. 14. *c* Eph. iv. 31, 32.

urge are various and numerous. I shall, however, only touch upon them. Let me then persuade you, Sirs, to your duty.

1. From considerations of humanity and kindness.

Good-nature, or a desire to make their fellow-creatures happy, is what some possess, who yet enter not into the spirit of real religion. How great a reproach then would it be to the Christian name, were those who profess it to be defective in this amiable temper, wherein *they* of all others ought to excell! God forbid! that such a charge should ever lie against the disciples of the meek, the compassionate, the friendly Jesus. No. The grace of God, wherever it prevails, softens the heart, meliorates the affections, and melts the soul into tenderness and love. And if it be so, how can a society composed of Christian members be without bowels of kindness towards their minister? It cannot. A general idea of the nature and duties of this important office would, methinks, be sufficient to excite the humane and benevolent feelings of their breasts: what effect then, must a recollection of the numerous difficulties and discouragements, which attend it, produce? Here I might put you in mind—of the many sad conflicts which they, who serve you in the gospel, endure in common with others as Christians; conflicts with sin, with Satan, and with the world—of the extraordinary anxieties, fears and temptations, which are peculiar to them as ministers—of the painful labours, not only of public preaching, but of continual meditation and study—and of the distress they often feel, occasioned by the various tempers, passions and prejudices of mankind, by the unsuccessfulness of their ministry in some instances, and by the sloth and indifference, not to say the unworthy conduct of many under a profession of religion. But it were endless to be particular. A considerate person will easily give me credit when I affirm, that the difficulties attending this sacred office are great—very great. Surely then the sincere and faithful servant of Christ hath, upon the common principles of humanity, no inconsiderable title to your regard. —I speak not this, my friends, from any doubt of your tender and affectionate disposition. No. I am well persuaded you possess this amiable temper. You have given many

strong and convincing proofs of it.—From motives of good-nature therefore, which have an easy access to your hearts, I go on,

2. To those of justice.

Degenerate as mankind are, there is such a thing as honesty in the world. And where may we so reasonably expect to find it, as among those who call themselves Christians! If indeed any such are destitute of it, however splendid their external profession may be, they have no claim to that venerable character. Well! And are not the duties I have been recommending the dictates of truth and equity? If God in his word has authorised such a relation, as that which subsists between my brother and you, and if you have mutually and voluntarily entered into it; as he is obliged to the performance of the duties he has undertaken, so are you to yours. The regards therefore which a people shew to their minister, are to be considered not as the obligations of benevolence only, but of integrity and righteousness. Is it fit, is it reasonable, is it just, that a man should devote his time, his strength, his spirits, his abilities to the interests of others, and to their most essential interests too; and receive none of those returns that have been mentioned? How can persons answer it to God or their own consciences, to treat those with whom they stand thus connected, or their ministrations, with indifference and neglect? From this topic the apostle reasons in his epistle to the Corinthians, and elsewhere. But the matter is so clear, I forbear to enlarge. It speaks for itself.—Let me proceed therefore a step farther, and argue,

3. From motives of self-interest.

This, of all other principles, is the most prevalent in the human heart. Convince a man, thoroughly convince him, that his interest is concerned; and the object proposed, be it what it may, will instantly become important: it will immediately engage his attention, his passions, and his pursuit. Well! and wherein does our truest interest consist? The question with a good man is quickly decided. He is come to a point upon the matter. It consists in the favour of God, and a growing conformity to his image. Now the means of reli-

gion which Christ has instituted in his church, are clearly adapted to promote our good in each of these respects, that is, to excite in our breasts a lively and cheerful sense of the divine favour and friendship, and to confirm and strengthen our attachments to truth and holiness. If therefore the means of religion are to be diligently used, in order to the attaining these important ends; we are surely consulting our own good, when we are affording all the support, assistance and encouragement that lies in our power, to those whom God has appointed, and we have chosen, to be helpers of our faith and joy. We are consulting, I say, our own interest, our best, our noblest, our most essential interest. Every proper token of affection and regard to them will be richly repaid. Our diligent attendance on their ministry, our fervent prayers for the success of their labours, and above all, our exemplary conversation, will have the happy effect to quicken and enliven them in their work. And so shall we contribute to our own honour, happiness and usefulness. With what warmth, what spirit, what energy, do the apostles address the Thessalonians upon these matters!—*We live, if ye stand fast in the Lord* a. "If ye adhere firmly to Christ, to his doctrine and institutions, cultivating the Christian temper, and adorning your profession with the fruits of righteousness; *we live*—ye make us happy, fill our hearts with joy, and inspire us with new vigour and resolution in the discharge of our duty. And so will ye in return, be farther benefited by our labours, to which ye have thus afforded so noble an assistance." In like manner we hear them reasoning with the Corinthians;—*Do we begin to commend ourselves? or need we as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men: forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshly tables of the heart* b.——To this motive of self-interest I will add,

4. That of a public spirit.

a 1 Thess. iii. 8. b 2 Cor. iii. 1—3.

By a public spirit I mean a readiness to contribute what lies in our power, towards the welfare of our fellow-creatures, both in an individual and social capacity. A truly noble temper this! Now religion is the only effectual means of promoting the real happiness of mankind, as it holds up to their view the brightest prospects in another world, and as it best enables them to answer the true ends of their existence in this. *Godliness is profitable unto all things, having a promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come a.* Nor is it less adapted to promote the good of society in general, since it strengthens and invigorates all those virtuous and friendly affections which are of the greatest public utility. If therefore the Christian ministry, which has the interest of religion for its immediate object, is of divine appointment; it is surely a noble expression of a public spirit, to do our utmost for the support of it. By countenancing, assisting and encouraging the ministers of Jesus in their work, we give the strongest proof of our tender compassion for the ignorant, the guilty, and the miserable, and of our generous concern to spread the inestimable blessings of knowledge, peace and happiness among all around us. Have you then, my friends, been convinced of the truth of religion upon the most clear and substantial evidence? Have you been satisfied, from your own experience, of its pleasantness, importance and utility? And have you been charmed with the happy fruits of it, which you have observed in the tempers and lives of others?—Let me appeal to these convictions, to these experiences, to these reflections, accompanied with all the genuine feelings of humanity, for your obligations to the several duties I have been recommending.

But the consideration which of all others most demands our attention is,

5. And lastly, the honour due to the grace of God, so illustriously displayed in our redemption by Christ. To publish to the world this faithful saying, this saying worthy of all acceptation, *that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners b*, is the grand object of the Christian ministry. Nor is it indeed in the power of men or angels fully to describe the

a 1 Tim. iv. 8. b 1 Tim. i. 15.

wonders of this astonishing instance of divine mercy and goodness.—Amazing love!—unparalleled grace! The Son of God becomes incarnate, bleeds and dies, to redeem us from endless woes, and to exalt us to a perfection of felicity and glory. O the height, the depth, the length, the breadth of the love of God in Jesus Christ! It passeth knowledge. At these reflections, Christians, every divine passion in your breasts must surely kindle into a flame. And amidst that warm glow of wonder, love and gratitude you feel, is it not your first concern to know how you may most effectually advance his glory in the world to whom you are so deeply indebted?—You cannot be at a loss, while you reflect on the nature of that dispensation of religion which Christ has established, and on the duties which of consequence you owe to his ministers and to one another. *He that receiveth whomsoever I send*, says the Saviour, *receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me a.* Be persuaded therefore by the love you bear to Christ, and by your concern for his honour and interest, to express an affectionate and becoming regard to my brother, whom you are yourselves satisfied he has sent, and who has this day devoted himself to your service in the gospel.

Thus by all the motives of humanity and kindness, of justice and equity, of self-interest, of a public spirit, and of zeal for the glory of God, and the honour of Christ, would I urge the duties that have been laid before you, so far as you shall find them agreeable to the dictates of truth, reason and the word of God: at the same time expressing my full satisfaction of your cheerful readiness to conform to the divine will.

And now to close the whole, and yet farther to enforce what has been said, if that were necessary, let me carry your views forward to that bright and glorious day, when the ends of all these institutions and duties I have been recommending, shall have been fully accomplished; and both you, my friends, and your minister shall receive your reward at the hands of the blessed Jesus; you of all your tenderness and affection for him, and he of all his cheerful and painful labours for you. O what mutual congratulations! what pleasing reflections! what

a John xiii. 20.

rapturous joys! will distinguish that happy period.—In the mean while, may *the God of peace that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus Christ, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever.* Amen *a*.

a Heb. xiii. 20, 21.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF CONFORMING TO THE WORLD:

A

SERMON

PREACHED

AT A MONTHLY EXERCISE

AT THE

REV. MR. REYNOLDS'S MEETING-PLACE, NEAR CRIPPLE-GATE, MARCH 21st, 1771.

THE FOLLY AND DANGER OF CONFORMING TO THE WORLD.

ROM. XII. 2.—*And be not conformed to this world*——.

OF all the distinctions which have obtained among mankind, none is so important, so interesting and so necessary, as that of *the men of the world*, and *the men of God*. A distinction which hath existed from the beginning, and which consists not in forms and appearances, but in reality and truth: a distinction which respects the temper of our hearts, and the conduct of our lives. The men of the world are those who, having received the spirit of the world, indiscriminately conform to its customs and usages, and vehemently pursue its profits and pleasures—pursue them as their portion, their heaven, their all. The men of God, on the other hand, are those who, being *dead to the world*, to use the language of Scripture, are *alive unto God*, make his favour their chief happiness, and a conformity to his will, upon the noblest principles, their main concern. Now the majority lies very considerably on the side of the world: from whence it follows, that he who will be truly religious must needs be singular. And singularity, whatever substantial reasons there may be to justify it, is a very disagreeable thing; especially in the present case, since human nature is in a depraved state, and we are all unduly attached to sensible objects. To dare to be singular in our opinions requires resolution; but to dare to be so in our practice requires still more resolution. To maintain the truth with constancy, amidst the vain speculations and subtile reasonings of artful men, is hard; but to maintain a temper and conduct chaste, spiritual and heavenly, amidst the surrounding allurements of a gay and thoughtless world, is still harder.

Since, therefore, this is a matter of such vast importance, and attended with so many difficulties, we need frequently be animated to it, by all the motives which that divine religion

we profess and believe so largely furnishes. And surely it must be acknowledged, that this is a time wherein exhortations of this sort are peculiarly seasonable; a time of prosperity, and therefore very unfavourable to religious singularity; and a time wherein many, who would think it hard was the sincerity of their profession called in question, yet are not easily to be distinguished from the world, which is at an irreconcileable enmity with it. If the primitive Christians, amidst the frowns of persecution, which have a tendency to excite fervour and resolution in religion, stood in need of the caution in our text; we certainly stand in greater need of it, who are powerfully invited into the embraces of the world, by the mighty charms and persuasions of ease, plenty, liberty and prosperity. To us therefore may we consider the apostle, yea, even our divine Master himself, as saying with peculiar warmth and earnestness—*Be not conformed unto this world.* This then is the subject I would now attempt to explain and improve among you. And may God of his infinite mercy grant, that it may have its suitable influence on each of our minds!

The caution in our text very naturally and instructively follows the exhortation in the preceding verse, with which the apostle introduces the applicatory part of his epistle. *I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service a.* Here we see the Christian persuaded, by the divine mercies displayed in the gospel of Jesus, to make a tender of himself, his body and soul, his interests and abilities both natural and spiritual, unto God. From a man of the world we see him become a man of God. And how just, how seasonable, the caution that follows! *And be not conformed to this world.* "To God you have surrendered yourself; be henceforth a follower of him, and not of the world. Let the time past of your life suffice you to have wrought the will of the Gentiles; and now no longer live the rest of your time in the flesh, to the lusts of men, but to the will of God *b*."

In discoursing of the text I shall,

a Ver. 1. *b* 1 Pet. iv. 2, 3.

I. Shew you what this caution of the apostle supposes;

II. In a few words explain it; and,

III. Consider the reasonableness and importance of it.

I. What does this caution of the apostle suppose? It supposes—that the way, the manner or the course of this world is very bad—that Christians, nevertheless, are too prone to conform to it—and that there is great danger attending such conduct. You will excuse me, if I here insist particularly on the two first of these, as they are considerations which, rightly understood, will prepare the way for what is to follow.

First, It is taken for granted that the way, the manner, the course of this world is very bad.

And which of us is there, who knows any thing of the world, but will readily acknowledge that this is the fact? What scenes of avarice and oppression, deceit and falsehood, malice and revenge, pride and vanity, vice and debauchery, does this earthly globe, yea every part of it, exhibit to our view! How variously are the passions of men agitated! What divers characters do they assume! And what different parts do they act on the stage of life! Some we see contending for power and dominion, some for honour and applause, some for wealth and riches, and some for sensual pleasures and gratifications; and each in order to compass his ends, exhausting all the force of art, ingenuity, attention, labour and influence. Here we shall see one putting on the mask of friendship and affection, to allure and deceive; another secretly undermining his neighbour's reputation and good name; another defrauding him of his substance, by open violence, by wilful perjury, or by private art and collusion; another grinding the poor; another courting the great; another seducing the innocent; yea another, horrible to behold! imbruing his hands in human blood. Shall I tell you of the thousands slain in the field, to gratify the pride, ambition and power of princes? Shall I describe to you the flattery and adulation, the faithless vows and promises, and the numerous intrigues and policies which prevail in courts? Shall I say what schemes are contriving, and what measures are daily executing, among men of trade and business, to compass their unlawful designs and avaricious purposes? Shall I point to the secret recesses of

lewdness and debauchery, and tell you of the wantonness, folly and luxury that are to be found there? Shall I remind you of the feuds and animosities of public bodies of men, of the quarrels and contentions of families, and of the extravagance and gaiety, the avarice and selfishness of individuals? In short, were it in my power to lead you into the hearts of men, those secret chambers of imagery; to give you a history of the passions, their rise, progress and effect; and to shew you the abominations of fraud, perfidy, dissimulation, pride, envy, lust, malice and revenge, that have been perpetrated on the wide theatre of this earth, among all ranks and orders of men, privately and openly, and under all shapes and appearances, how would you stand astonished!—Such then is the way of the world, such the temper and spirit of the greater part of mankind, whatever restraints knowledge, education, decency and the authority of human laws, may have in some instances laid upon their conduct! But it is not my design, nor am I able, to give you a complete picture of the world: you have only the outlines of it. Yet with me surely you will acknowledge, from this general view of it, that its form is hideous and detestable.

And such the world hath been from the beginning, I mean ever since the apostacy of our first parents. What a miserable appearance does the old world make in history! It stood a long while, and was very full of inhabitants: but we have little else told us concerning it, except its wickedness, that *the wickedness of man was great, and* that *every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*; and again, that *God looked upon the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth a.* They seem to have risen to the greatest heights of impiety imaginable; for the apostle Peter calls them emphatically, *The world of the ungodly b.* And the contagion of vice and evil example seems to have taken a universal spread; for it is remarkable that we read of but four good men between Adam and Noah; and that was a period of upwards of a thousand years. The course of the world was then surely very bad.

a Gen. iv. 5, 12. *b* 2 Pet. ii. 5.

But was it better afterwards? Perhaps when light increased the manners of men might change; at least decency and civility might more generally prevail. But alas! we read of little of this down to the time of Moses, and the erection of the Israelites into a separate nation in the land of Judea. And though through their means, under the blessing of God, the doctrine of morality was better understood than it had been before; yet mankind for the most part discovered the same depraved disposition, and ran into the same corrupt practices they had formerly done. Yea the Jews themselves, though distinguished by the peculiar advantages of a divine revelation and an extraordinary providence, soon became infamous for their pride, hypocrisy, impiety and unbelief. So that the psalmist complained in his time, that among them as well as the Gentiles, there were 'none righteous no not one;' that 'none sought after God, none did good, but all were gone out of the way;' that 'their throat was an open sepulchre,' that 'their tongues used deceit,' that 'their mouth was full of cursing and their feet swift to shed blood;' that 'destruction and misery was in their ways, and the fear of God was not before their eyes *a*.'

And how it was when our Saviour appeared on the earth, both sacred and profane history largely testifies. *The whole world*, the apostle John tells us, *lay in wickedness*, overwhelmed with ignorance, guilt and misery *b*. The prince of the power of the air had extended his dominion far and wide, and both Jews and Gentiles were all agreed in their subjection to him. The like abominable and diabolical practices, though in some places perhaps more subtilly refined and clothed in a more decent habit, every where prevailed. And, whatever effect the gospel might have where it was preached, and however the works of the devil, the established institutions of idolatry and superstition, were in many countries shaken and destroyed, yet, in a few countries, Satan seemed to have almost entirely recovered his former power, and those very nations where the gospel had been received returned again to his allegiance. So that for a long course of years the world was as ignorant, stupid

a Compare Rom. iii. 9—18. with Psal. xiv, liii, &c. *b* 1 John v. 19.

and wicked as ever, except a small remnant in some remote corners of the earth, who kept their garments from defilement, and maintained the gospel in its genuine purity. And after this, when the light of the reformation shone upon the world, and apostolic times again returned; how soon did these and the other nations, which had reaped such singular advantages from that extraordinary, I had almost said miraculous, interposition of divine power; how soon, I say, did they again relapse into their former evil customs and practices, though not into the like degree of ignorance and superstition! And if we look around us and inquire into the present state of things among us, must we not acknowledge that, amidst all the light and liberty we enjoy, the course of the world is much the same as it hath been all along? Mankind are still governed by the same maxims, the same prejudices, the same passions. They are now, the generality of them, as sensual, worldly and diabolical in their temper and practice as ever. They are all pursuing the same ends, and many of them scarcely held within the bounds of decency even by human laws, enforced by the most severe sanctions. Yea, under the mask of religion, what villany and wickedness is perpetrated in our land! Such then is the course of the world, so it always hath been, so it is, and so it always will be, I fear, to the end. And this is what, in the first place, the text supposes. It supposes also,

Secondly, That Christians are too prone to conform to the world. I mean not that good men are in any great danger of copying after the world, in those flagrant instances of vice which have been just now mentioned; though even from these, when assaulted with sudden and violent temptation, they had need of the grace of God to secure them. But, what I mean is an unwarrantable approach towards the world, an inconsiderate compliance with such modes and usages of it as are of a sinful and pernicious tendency, and some taints, though but partial, of its defilement, and which I shall by and by more particularly explain. Of this evil there is great danger, and we cannot but be sensible of it from our own experience, and from daily observation on thousands around us, of whom, however, we would hope better things than that

they are mere nominal professors of religion. Now from whence does this danger arise, which gives occasion to the caution in our text? Why,

1. From that *depravity* of nature, which though in a good measure corrected and subdued, is common to them with others. There are the same seeds of folly and sin in Christians as in the rest of mankind; and they are continually springing up in their breasts, to the great detriment of their peace and comfort, and their purity and usefulness. Which of us can say he is wholly free from pride, ambition, envy, lust, and other irregular inclinations? The grace of God does not absolutely and entirely extirpate these passions out of the human heart, but permits them, like the beasts in Daniel, to live while it deprives them of their dominion. And of consequence there will be a propensity to conform, at least in some instances, to the world: the injurious effects of which we shall hereafter consider. Great danger arises also,

2. From the *peculiar situations* and connexions of some Christians. We are all more or less connected with the world, and with the men of it: but there are some who are obliged to converse more intimately with it than others. Their affairs unavoidably lead them into an extensive acquaintance with the customs and manners of the times. They are under a necessity, how much soever against their inclination, to be the spectators of many sad scenes of pride, gaiety and wantonness, of fraud, dissimulation and iniquity. And, as the heart of man is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, it is ever in danger of catching fire from the sparks of sin thus continually flying around it. They who live therefore in the midst of a perverse and adultérous generation, had need use great caution to keep their garments from defilement.

3. *Good-nature* proves also a snare to many, and is a just ground for the caution in the text. A free, courteous, affable behaviour is very commendable, and not a little ornamental to religion. Nay religion teaches it: it forbids moroseness and severity, and warmly inculcates a spirit of generosity, kindness and love. But then it often happens, that as good-nature and complaisance, when carried to an excess, make a very near ap-

proach to insincerity and dishonesty, so they betray persons into undue compliances with the world. How many, through easiness of temper, have sacrificed their immortal souls as well as their temporal interests, to a fond desire of pleasing men, and of being upon fair terms with the world! Their good-nature hath robbed them of their resolution, and so laid them open, thus defenceless, to the sudden attack of every little temptation. Indeed the grace of God, where it hath taken possession of the heart, will lay such restraints upon natural temper as to secure it from these very dangerous excesses. But still there are many instances wherein good men themselves, through a fear of offending, and an unwillingness to contradict, have unhappily been guilty of compliances very unbecoming their character. There are seasons when it is our indispensable duty boldly to assert the cause we profess, and with steadiness to oppose the folly and wantonness of others. But how apt are we on these occasions to yield, if not to considerations of worldly prudence and policy, yet to the dictates of false tenderness and a disinclination to give pain! Good-nature therefore should be watched, lest it become an occasion of undue conformity to the world. To which I will add what is pretty near a-kin to it, and that is,

4. A dislike of singularity. This is what I hinted at in the beginning of this discourse. It is hard to row against the stream, hard for one to contend with a thousand. We are not easily persuaded to oppose popular notions, much less popular practices. So we either persuade ourselves, though very falsely, that the right is on the side of the multitude, and that if we are with them we shall do as well as they: or else to avoid the charge of preciseness, we keep our religion as much as we can to ourselves, and go to the utmost limits our conscience will allow us in our conformity to the opinions and manners of those around us. A meanness this unworthy of the brave and spirited character of a genuine Christian! A propensity, however, to it is a ground of the caution in our text.—Thus you see how we become liable to be drawn into an unreasonable and sinful conformity to the world. Again,

Thirdly, The caution supposes danger in such a conformity.

And indeed the danger is very great, much greater than, I fear, the generality of Christians imagine. But I forbear to point out the mischief of it in this place, as that will be more properly my business by and by.

Thus have we gone through the first head of discourse, which was to shew what this caution of the apostle supposes. It supposes—that the world, that is, the course or manner of it, is very bad—that even Christians themselves are liable to be drawn into undue compliances with it: which is the effect of the remaining depravity of their nature; of the particular stations of life which some of them fill; of easiness of natural temper; and of an aversion to singularity. And then it further supposes—the danger of this conformity to be very great. We proceed now,

II. To explain the caution, and to shew in what sense a Christian may, and in what he may not conform to the world.

First, There are some instances wherein it is very allowable, nay it is the Christian's duty, to conform to the world.

1. In general, to accommodate ourselves to the understandings and tempers of mankind is certainly very right, provided we do not sacrifice truth and conscience to such a conformity. This is what we call good nature, which when carried to excess, as I have just now shewn you, is a great evil, but when held under due restraints, is highly commendable. Surely no one will be so mad as to say, that religion requires us to be ill-natured. I know there are some who under pretence of extraordinary piety, assume a severe, morose, gloomy countenance, and take upon them to quarrel with all around them. But this is a conduct by no means to be justified: on the contrary, it is very indecent, and hath done great injury to real religion. It is possible indeed such an appearance and behaviour may in some instances be natural and constitutional: and where this is the case, it should be the business of religion to restrain and correct it. The same apostle, who dissuades us from being conformed to the world, bids us *be kind one to another* [a]; and, in this very chapter, exhorts us to *be of the same mind one towards another*, and to *condescend to men of low estate* [b]. And

[a] Eph. iv. 32. [b] Ver. 16.

another apostle admonishes us to *be courteous*, that is, affable and obliging *a*. And surely affability, as it is a part of moral virtue, very well consists with Christianity, nay is heightened and improved by it. For what hath such a mighty tendency to soften the heart, and to prompt men to an agreeable, obliging carriage towards each other, as the grace and love, the benignity and kindness which breathe through the gospel? Much of this was seen in our blessed Saviour: and whoever is acquainted with the history and writings of the apostle Paul, must acknowledge that it was in his very nature; and that it shewed itself on all proper occasions, to the honour of that divine religion he professed. And so,

2. It is very allowable to conform to the indifferent customs and usages of the country where we dwell. Some indeed have made religion to consist very much in dress, and have insisted that Christians should distinguish themselves by a remarkable plainness and peculiarity of habit. But there seems no just ground for this either in reason or in the word of God. Every one's dress should be agreeable to his rank; and when we go beyond that, we violate the rules of decency, and consequently of religion. There are also some fashions so vain and foolish, I had almost said immodest, that a giddy compliance with them is most certainly a high affront to that sobriety, which the profession of the gospel teaches and enjoins. And I wish there was no ground for complaints of this sort among some who call themselves Christians. But a remarkable singularity in our outward appearance is as unbecoming, as extravagance the other way; since it savours of vanity and affectation, and leads persons to imagine that religion consists in what is wholly foreign to it. Our Saviour took great pains to correct mistakes of this sort among the Jews, and to shew that the singularities of the Pharisees were very offensive in the sight of God, as they were manifestly the effect of pride and ostentation. We may, we ought then to conform to the world in those civil usages and customs, whether of dress or behaviour, which are in themselves decent, and which are wholly indifferent and unexceptionable.

a 1 Pet. iii. 8.

And here a question arises with respect to rites and ceremonies in matters of religion. Are we to conform to such rites, I mean, to those which are merely of human appointment? The answer is, I think, very natural and reasonable. We are not. Christ alone is king in his church. He hath instituted such ordinances and forms of worship, as he hath judged fit and necessary. And to add to them seems at least to carry in it an imputation on his wisdom and authority: and it hath this, I think, unanswerable objection to it, that it opens the door to a thousand innovations (as the history of the Church of Rome hath sufficiently shewn) which are not only indifferent in themselves, but highly absurd and extremely detrimental to religion. Besides, if there were nothing else to be said against such a conformity, this I think must have great weight with a considerate mind, that when things indifferent come to be imposed and made necessary, they lose their very nature, and are most justly exceptionable.

A conformity then to the tempers of mankind, and to the customs and usages of the country where we dwell, as far as it will consist with decency and a good conscience, is certainly both allowable and commendable: and that for this reason, not only because it is fit in itself, but because it the better enables a Christian to be useful in society, and to promote the real interests of religion. It was expressly with this view that the apostle acted when, as he tells us, *he became all things to all men, that he might by all means save some a.*—But it is time I now come to shew you,

Secondly, In what senses we ought not to conform to the world.

Now this caution hath a further view, than merely to restrain us from those notoriously vicious and abominable practices, which were mentioned at the beginning of this discourse; for such practices are diametrically opposite to the Christian doctrine and profession; and he who immerges himself into them is confessedly no Christian, and comes more properly under the denomination of a man *of* the world, than of one who conforms to it. The spirit of the world is in him, and hath a commanding influence on the general course of his

a 1 Cor. ix. 22.

life. The meaning of the text therefore is, that we should bear no resemblance to the world, should not be at all *fashioned according* to it, as the original word is elsewhere rendered *a*, that we should keep at a distance from the world in our principles, spirit and conduct—that we should not adopt its false maxims and reasonings—that we should not covet its honours, riches and pleasures—that we should not affect to be thought men of the world, studiously endeavour to accommodate ourselves to it, or aim to be held in esteem and reputation by it—that we should not imitate the world in a vain, foolish, sensual temper; in an idle, frothy, unprofitable conversation; and much less in a loose, irregular, disorderly behaviour—that we should connect ourselves as little as may be with the world, abstain from all appearance of evil, and keep our garments, if possible, from all defilement, pure and unspotted.—Such is the general sense of the caution in the text. And from hence it follows, that there is good ground for the distinction the apostle elsewhere observes between the ideas of *lawfulness* and *expediency b*. There are a thousand things in the world, in the tempers, customs and manners of mankind, which, however innocent in themselves, are unbecoming a Christian: and these surely it is his wisdom and duty to avoid. Here I might mention many kinds of amusements, which, though generally practised and not absolutely criminal, yet are vain, trifling and unmanly, and therefore unchristian; amusements which tend to enervate the mind, dissipate the passions, and cool the heart to the nobler exercises and enjoyments of religion; and to which there is this further unanswerable objection, that however we might not ourselves suffer materially by them, yet our example would have a very ill effect upon others. In respect, therefore, of all these matters, it is the language of the text, *Be not conformed to the world.* From whence I now go on,

III. To shew you, as was proposed, the reasonableness and importance of this caution.

It is a caution given us by an inspired apostle; an apostle who had a large acquaintance with the world, who well under-

a συχηματιζεσθε, 1 Pet. i. 14. *b* 1 Cor. x. 23.

stood mankind, who entered thoroughly into the secret operations and feelings of the human heart, and was no stranger to the imperfections of the best of men, or to the various and powerful temptations with which they are encompassed on every side. It is a caution, I will add, given us by a man endowed with a prophetic spirit, and who clearly foresaw what mighty opposition the world would make in future times, as well as in the infancy of the church, to the Christian doctrine and profession. We are to consider him therefore, as pressing this advice upon us with the same earnestness as upon the Romans. And there is the greater reason for this, as our situation is so similar to theirs who were inhabitants of the fairest, wealthiest and politest city in the whole world, and therefore exposed to greater danger than most other Christians. You will allow me then to enforce the exhortation with some suitable motives. And here I would remind you,

1. Of what hath been already granted, that this is a very unfit world for a Christian to conform to.

What kind of world it is you have seen. It hath been painted in its true colours, though not with all the shades that might have been cast upon it, nor in all the detestable forms it might have been represented. Look around you, and behold the pride, luxury, avarice, fraud, cruelty, and other sensual and diabolical vices and practices which prevail among mankind; and say, whether a Christian, instead of conforming to the world, ought not to shun it as his greatest enemy. How opposite is the general course of the world to the doctrine, spirit and profession of the gospel! Can you conceive of two greater contrarieties in nature? Do not the Scriptures ever set the kingdom of Christ, and that of the world, in opposition to each other? Is not the god of this world, the determined, the avowed opposer of Christ and his gospel? Are not the people of God always represented as a body distinct and separate from the world? Was it not the professed design of our Saviour's incarnation and death to redeem them from this present evil world? And is it not on account of their different natures, dispositions, tendencies and interests, that the world is every where represented as hating and persecuting them who

fear God?—Shall a Christian then conform to this world? Shall he pay his devotion to it? Shall he court its friendship? Shall he imitate it? Shall he affect a similarity to it? No surely. *For what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols a?*

2. As the course of this world is bad, and therefore in its own nature very unfit for a Christian to conform to; so a conformity to it, even in a small degree, is of very hurtful and dangerous consequence.

It is a passage that may well make the hearts of many under a profession of religion tremble: *Whosoever will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God b.* Would to God that men would consider it, that they would lay it to heart! How many immortal souls have been ignominiously led away into wretched captivity to this proud, this cruel usurper! Yea, how many have not only been cast down and wounded, but totally ruined and undone by his rage and malice! What a sad list do the Scriptures present us with of some such persons in the primitive times! I might tell you of Demas, who, *having loved this present world c*, forsook the apostle, and it is probable his profession too: and of many others, who through the same cause, *fell into temptation, and a snare, and into* various *foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition d.*

And as thus the mere nominal professor of religion hath been subdued and conquered by the world; so the people of God themselves have, many of them, received no small injury from it. By a partial conformity to the world they have lost much of the spirit and pleasure of religion, obstructed their usefulness, disgraced their character, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. If it be difficult for the Christian whose situation *obliges* him to converse with the world, to keep alive in his heart that divine fire which the grace of

a 2 Cor. vi. 14—16. *b* James iv. 4.
c 2 Tim. iv. 10. *d* 1 Tim. vi. 9.

God hath kindled there; how must the flame languish in his breast, who *unnecessarily* precipitates himself into connections that are vain and foolish, if not absolutely immoral and sinful! Would you frame a just idea of the unhappy condition of that man? Enter into his heart, and see how barren and unfruitful it is. There, where holy desires and spiritual affections once prevailed, little else is to be found but anxiety and care, or wantonness and folly. Go with him into his retirements, and observe how carelessly the private duties of religion are performed, if not wholly neglected. Follow him into the family where he lives, and the company he keeps, and tell us how vain, thoughtless and unprofitable is the general course of his conversation. But, in order yet further to impress your mind with his folly, guilt and misery, view him on his return to God, well consider the bitter pangs his heart feels, and the sorrowful sighs that arise from his inmost soul. Let these be imagined—O! with him feel them; and then say, how evil and bitter a thing it is to forsake God, and to conform to the world. *Ye have not received*, Christians, *the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God a.* Take heed therefore how *ye grieve the Holy Spirit; whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption b.* Again,

3. Conformity to the world is most unreasonable in a Christian, as it adds weight and influence to the world, and tends greatly to promote its interests among mankind.

This fair and enchanting idol, the world, hath many votaries, who daily sacrifice at her altar, and pay homage at her feet. Their number is far greater than that of the worshippers of the living God; and, though the cause is bad, their zeal to promote it far exceeds that of multitudes who profess the true religion. Now, what more acceptable service, Christian, can you offer to this false deity, than by admitting of an intercommunity of worship with these her blind and miserable votaries, that is, by conforming to the world in the manner I have represented? And will you thus give countenance to a kind of idolatry the most dishonourable to God, and of the most pernicious tendency to men? Will you thus strengthen the in-

a 1 Cor. ii. 12. *b* Eph. iv. 30.

terests, and gratify the malice of Satan the prince of darkness? Will you thus affront your Almighty Saviour, who, with his own most precious blood hath *redeemed* you *from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers a*? Will you thus wound the hearts, and weaken the hands of your fellow-disciples? In fine, will you thus become accessories to the ruin of thousands around you? Far be it from you. This were a conduct most absurd, disingenuous and ungrateful in *you*, who are so highly indebted to the grace of God, and have such bright and glorious prospects before you.—To conform to the world, I will add,

4. Is to violate the express precepts, and to deviate from the most illustrious examples, recorded in the book of God.

When the apostle had been dissuading the Corinthians from this conduct, in a passage already cited, and representing the manifest absurdity and danger of it; he immediately subjoins this authoritative command, with a most gracious and alluring promise annexed to it: 'Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty *b*.' To this same command Enoch, Noah, Lot, Moses, and a cloud of other witnesses, whose names are enrolled in the sacred volume, were obedient. Instructed in the knowledge of the true God, animated by the exalted hope of his favour through the Messiah, and steeled with that divine fortitude which his grace inspires, they dared to be singular. Neither the frowns nor the flatteries of the world could subdue them. They 'endured, seeing him who is invisible;' and 'having respect to the recompence of reward, chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season *c*.' Here I might also hold up to your view the characters and lives of the apostles and primitive Christians, and what is infinitely more animating, the bright and perfect pattern of the Son of God himself.—but I forbear. It shall suffice to observe,

a 1 Pet. i. 18. *b* 2 Cor. vi. 17, 18. *c* Heb. xi. 25—27.

5. And lastly, That we are obliged by our own profession and vows to pay a due regard to this apostolic caution.

When we first put on Christ by baptism, we solemnly renounced the world with all its pomps and vanities. And this was done by *you*, my friends, to whom I more immediately address myself, in your own persons, and not by the medium of sponsors; in your riper years, and not in infancy, when you were utterly incapable of vows and promises. It was done deliberately, and, I trust, under a full conviction that it was both your duty and interest thus to yield yourselves to God. And this your baptismal vow hath been often renewed at the table of Christ, and in other solemn acts of religious worship. Take heed then how you violate such engagements. To fall into practices grossly immoral and vicious, would be base and perfidious indeed! At the very thought of such conduct you tremble. Remember then that a conformity to the world in these lesser instances which have been mentioned, is an approach towards that guilt you so much abhor and deprecate. From this topic the apostle reasons with these very Romans, to whom he addresses the caution in our text, 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ, were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life *a*.'

Thus have I laid before you the grounds of this most important and interesting advice in the text. And what remains now, but that I exhort you and myself with great earnestness and affection to carry it into practice? Let me then address all those divine feelings which are peculiar to you as the disciples of Jesus, and the possessors of his grace—your zeal for the glory of God—your love to your Almighty Saviour—your jealousy for the honour of religion—your generous concern for the real welfare of mankind—and your ardent wishes for your own happiness. By these, by each of these, by all these considerations, let me beseech you, brethren, as ye have presented yourselves to God a living and holy sacrifice, that

a Rom. vi. 3, 4.

ye would no longer *be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.* What objection can you have to so reasonable an exhortation? I know of but one; and it would be as great a reflection upon your understanding as upon your piety, to suppose it will have any great weight with you. It is the charge of preciseness and singularity—a charge that will do you real honour. Your Master endured it before you, and was nobly superior to it. Be ye therefore followers of him. And as he hath required you, at the peril of his displeasure, which you of all things dread, to *deny yourselves* and *take up your cross* [a]; O! be obedient to the divine command. And, that you may the more easily combat the difficultics which lie in the way of your duty, let me further intreat you—to revolve seriously in your breasts the considerations that have been offered—to detach yourselves from all unnecessary connexions with the vain and thoughtless part of mankind—to make wise and good men your companions—to cry mightily to God for the seasonable restraints and influences of his grace—and to comfort yourselves with the animating prospect of that future happy world, where you, with all the excellent of the earth, shall see God, be like him, and enjoy him for ever.

[a] Matt. xvi. 24.

THE GREAT DUTY OF PROPAGATING THE TRUTH CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED:

IN

A SERMON,

PREACHED

AT SALTER'S-HALL, APRIL 12th, 1776,

BEFORE

THE CORRESPONDING BOARD IN LONDON,

OF THE

SOCIETY IN SCOTLAND

(INCORPORATED BY ROYAL CHARTER)

FOR

PROPAGATING CHRISTIAN KNOWLEDGE IN THE HIGHLANDS AND ISLANDS, AND FOR SPREADING THE GOSPEL AMONG THE INDIANS IN AMERICA.

THE GREAT DUTY OF PROPAGATING THE TRUTH CONSIDERED AND RECOMMENDED.

3 JOHN, VER. 8.—*We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.*

IT is very wonderful, considering the fair claim which the gospel hath to the character of TRUTH, that any, who would be thought men of probity and understanding, should treat it as a cunningly devised fable. But it is still more wonderful, considering the infinite excellence and importance of the gospel, that any who admit it to be true, should yet give it but a cold and heartless reception. This is the sad character, I fear, of great multitudes among us. Some, however, there are, who, emancipated from the base and cruel dominion of prejudice and sin, *receive the truth in the love of it*, and cheerfully become fellow-helpers with other good men in the cause of virtue and religion.

Of this number, in the first age of Christianity, was Gaius, the person to whom the apostle John addresses this short epistle. He was a man of wealth, piety, and a public spirit. The prosperity of his soul was such, that the apostle makes it the measure of his earnest wish, in regard of his bodily health. Both he and his children *walked in the truth*, so that his house was dedicated to the service of God. And not only the brethren, but strangers also, *bore witness of his charity before the church*. No wonder, therefore, the venerable apostle, who himself excelled in charity, addresses him as *the well-beloved Gaius*. Among others, to whom this excellent man extended his charitable regards, were those especially who, *for Christ's sake went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles*. For it was usual, in the first ages of Christianity, for missionaries to foreign parts, either to defray their own expences, or to have them borne by the church, lest they should be suspected by those to whom they preached of being influenced by mercenary views. Now, *we ought*, says the apostle in our text, *to receive such*; that is,

give them all the encouragement and assistance that lies in our power, *that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.*

The great business of spreading and promoting THE TRUTH in the world, with all the blessed advantages which result from it to individuals, and to society in general, is the object of this discourse. I propose, therefore,

FIRST, To inquire what is here meant by THE TRUTH, and why it is so called;

SECONDLY, To shew how we may become HELPERS to it; And,

THIRDLY, To persuade the friends and lovers of the truth, to apply themselves heartily to this great duty.

FIRST, If it be inquired, What is meant here by TRUTH?

I answer, not truth in general; for this is a term applicable to an infinite number of historical facts, and doctrinal propositions, with which religion is no ways concerned; and yet truth in every matter ought to be regarded and maintained. But by THE TRUTH here, as also in many other passages of Scripture, is meant the GOSPEL; that is, the sum of what the evangelists have reported concerning the person, character, actions, sufferings and glory of Christ; and the doctrine which our Saviour and his apostles have grounded upon these facts, namely, *That God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life a;* and *that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them b.* It is, in short, that wise and gracious constitution, whereby God assures believing and penitent sinners of pardon, acceptance and eternal life, through the merits and mediation of his own Son, promising them the seasonable and effectual influence of the Holy Spirit, to form and prepare them for the heavenly blessedness.—Now this gospel is, on several accounts, styled THE TRUTH. It is so described to express its *Authenticity—Simplicity*—and *Importance.*

First, It is *authentic* and *divine.*

That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, is a faithful saying c. We have every evidence to produce in support of its truth, that can be reasonably desired. To the excel-

a John iii. 16. b 2 Cor. v. 19. c 1 Tim. i. 15.

lent nature and tendency of the doctrine itself, and to its peculiar dignity and importance, we appeal for the high probability of its being true; and to attestations of a preternatural kind we appeal for the certainty of its coming down from God. The facts on which the gospel is founded, are reported to us by credible witnesses; and their testimony has the ample support of prophecy and miracle. *God, who, at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past to the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son a,* whom he hath raised from the dead, and received up through the clouds into heaven. Nor have the apostles reported to us *cunningly devised fables, when, having been themselves eye-witnesses of his majesty, they made known to us the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ b. The Word of life, whom they heard, whom they saw with their eyes, whom they looked upon, and whom their hands handled, they declared unto us c.* And their declaration we may, upon the surest grounds, conclude is truly conveyed down to us. The gospel, therefore, is THE TRUTH. Again, it is so styled to express perhaps,

Secondly, Its *Simplicity.*

Men have, indeed, differed in their reasonings about the gospel of Christ. Some have interwoven with it fancies of their own, clouded it with a thousand unavailing subtilties, and disgraced it with strange mixtures of folly and error. But it is, as we usually say of first principles, one plain simple thing, namely, *That God is in Christ reconciling sinners to himself d; —That he is offended, and that we are accepted in the beloved e; —That whoever believes in him shall be saved f;*—And *that there is no escaping, if we neglect this great salvation g.* Doubtless, there are innumerable glories to be espied in the gospel, in the facts it relates, and in the many doctrines that are connected with it. But the grand thing is to be collected in one point. And hence the questions the apostles put to the primitive converts at their baptism, were plain, short and simple. *If thou believest that Jesus is the Son of God, thou mayest h.*

a Heb. i. 1, 2. *b* 2 Pet. i. 16. *c* 1 John i. 1, 3.
d 2 Cor. v. 19. *e* Eph. i. 6. *f* Mark xvi. 16.
g Heb. ii. 3. *h* Acts viii. 37.

Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God a. Once more,

Thirdly, It is called THE TRUTH, emphatically, and by way of distinction from every thing else, to denote its *Importance.*

There are many truths in nature and morality, of no small consequence to the well-being of society; truths which require a good deal of pains to investigate; and which, when discovered, afford both pleasure and profit. But none are so momentous as the gospel: upon this our main happiness in the present life is suspended, and all our hope in the world to come. Should the gospel fail us, every other source of comfort and support will prove insufficient in a time of imminent temptation and danger, and in the hour of death. And hence the apostle expresses himself with so much warmth and earnestness upon this matter in his epistles: *God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world b. I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified c.* And again, *yea doubtless, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord d.* It is called THE TRUTH then, to express its *Authenticity, Simplicity*, and *Importance.*—We proceed now,

SECONDLY, To inquire how we are to become HELPERS to the truth.

Truth, strictly speaking, requires no assistance; for whether it is countenanced or opposed, it is, and ever will be the same. Yet a right knowledge of the gospel, a cheerful reception of it, and a due obedience to it, are matters, through various causes, attended with such difficulties, that not only the help of all the wisest and best of men, but that of God himself is necessary. Hence the ministers of the truth are said to be *workers*, or helpers, *together with God e.* And the gospel is *the power of God* unto salvation, to all them that believe *f.* When, indeed, we consider the commanding authority of divine truth, and its infinite importance to our present and everlasting interests, we cannot help wondering that it has not instantly the same effect on men's minds and hearts, that the great luminary in the hea-

a 1 John v. 1. *b* Gal. vi. 14. *c* 1 Cor. ii. 2.
d Phil. iii. 8. *e* 2 Cor. vi. 1. *f* Rom. i. 16.

vens has upon their persons; that it does not at once convince their judgments, and conciliate their affections. But when we turn our eyes to the false maxims and corrupt manners of this vain world, look narrowly into the human breast, and discern its perverse reasonings, wretched prejudices, and depraved passions; and, when we farther recollect what the Scriptures assure us of the God of this world, *that he worketh in the children of disobedience a*; we cease to wonder. What before induced a transient doubt of the truth of the gospel, the effect not being answerable to what we hastily expected, serves now to confirm our faith in it, since the fact, sad as it is, is thus naturally accounted for, and is exactly conformable to the predictions and histories of God's holy word.

But, while these reflections establish the point just now asserted, of the necessity of a divine influence to render the gospel successful, they by no means preclude the obligations that lie upon us, by instructions and persuasions, to become helpers to the truth. For, averse as men are, through prejudice and sin, to receive the gospel, it is by a kind of reasoning suited to their frame, as intelligent creatures, that they are to be convinced of its truth; and by motives which approve themselves to their judgment and consciences, that they are to be persuaded to embrace it. There is therefore full scope, in a dependence upon the blessing of God, for every possible exertion on our parts.

How then are we to help the truth? I answer,—by possessing men of the means of knowing it—by removing, so far as lies in our power, every obstruction to a free and full examination of it—by properly stating and defending it—by offering suitable motives to engage men to a cordial reception and profession of it—by adorning it with a holy life and conversation—and by earnestly imploring the blessing of God upon our endeavours.

First, We help the truth, by possessing men of the means of knowing it.

The Scriptures are the only pure and inexhaustible fountain of divine knowledge; wherefore the powers of Rome and Hell have spared no pains that it might be a spring shut up, and a fountain sealed; or, however, that the people should have ac-

a Eph. ii. 2.

cess to it through their means only. But these their iniquitous designs are defeated, by opening the avenues to this fountain, and diffusing the water of life, by every possible channel, through the whole known world. To have the Scriptures in our houses, to put them into the hands of our poor neighbours, and to teach them to read, and otherways to civilize them, in order to dispose and enable them to converse with the word of God; these are noble means of assisting the truth.

Faith comes by hearing; but how shall men hear without a preacher a? To do, therefore, what lies in our power towards raising up, qualifying and sending, those whom God has endowed with grace and gifts for preaching the gospel, is another mean of helping the truth. To which must be added, the settling of churches, the administering holy ordinances, the regularly attending upon them, the sending missionaries into remote parts, and into our own neighbourhood where ignorance and sin prevail, and the comforting the hearts and strengthening the hands of such faithful and laborious men, amidst all their numerous discouragements. This last particular comes up directly to what the apostle recommends and urges in our text—*We ought to receive and encourage such, that we might be fellow-helpers to the truth.*

And then, discoursing of the truth as opportunity offers, in which I include the exhorting and admonishing one another, catechising our children, and giving them not only the bible but other good books to read; this is another way of propagating the gospel. For, surely, it is the voice of Christ as well as of Moses, 'Thou shall diligently read the words I command thee unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thine house, and on thy gates *b*.'

Secondly, We may, we ought to become helpers to the truth, by removing, as far as lies in our power, every obstruction to a free and full examination of it.

a Rom. x. 17, 14. *b* Deut. vi. 7—9.

There are many prejudices in the breasts of men against the gospel, arising not only from corrupt affections common to all mankind, but from the various kinds of education, connexions, and worldly interests peculiar to some persons. The utmost attention, therefore, should be paid to these prejudices, and the most kind and prudent endeavours used to remove them; either by shewing that their prejudices have no real foundation, or that if men suffer in their temporal interests by receiving the truth, this only happens through the malevolence of the wicked, that Providence permits it for the good of them that fear him, and that there are considerations enough in the gospel to balance all these evils. To enumerate all the prejudices which obstruct the progress of the gospel, would carry me too far. I must not, however, omit to mention some, which appear to me to have a very fatal tendency. As for instance,

An apprehension that it is criminal to propound their doubts respecting the truth, has a direct tendency to prevent men's paying any attention at all to it. If I tell a man, that what I affirm is the truth, and that his business is implicitly to receive it, and not to urge any difficulty or objection to it; it is much if he do not instantly conclude, that what I propose to his faith is error, instead of truth; that I myself suspect it to be such, or, at least, that I mean this way to relieve myself of the trouble of solving his doubts. And thus, at the very outset, he is hindered from considering the truth; and I, instead of helping it, become injurious to it. That this has too often happened is not to be questioned; and thus hath the truth been betrayed by some who yet, in the judgment of charity, have meant to be its friends. But this surely is wrong: we ought to give persons full liberty to propose their difficulties, remembering that if we do not, they may be prejudiced against considering it at all; or, if they are rash enough to acknowledge it, their difficulties not being obviated, they do not truly believe it, but are only hypocritical professors of it; and, in this case, we become accessary to their hypocrisy. When our Lord bade the Jews *search the Scriptures*, he meant to give full scope to their inquiries, well knowing that the truth would not suffer from any objections offered to it, but rather from thence derive additional clearness and splendour. Farther,

The laying persons under any worldly discouragements whatsoever for not receiving the truth, is manifestly hindering, instead of promoting it. For, if these discouragements are meant to have the force of arguments to convince men of the truth; it is plain they cannot have the effect, not being at all adapted to the end: on the contrary, this method of reasoning will most certainly operate to the prejudice of the doctrine we teach, as it will lead them to conclude we have no better arguments to support it. And, if we use these discouragements as means to induce them to consider of the truth; besides the consideration that we have no authority from the word of God for such measures, we shall find it difficult to persuade them that our motive is not ill-will and resentment, rather than the good of their souls. Nay, upon the principle of the propriety of using moderate force, in order to oblige men to consider, we shall be justified, upon their continuing obstinate, in carrying that force to the utmost extreme in our power. And thus, the laying persons under any worldly discouragements for not receiving the truth, hath in it all the absurdity and obliquity of intolerance and persecution. The reverse, therefore, of all this is the natural and proper mean of helping the truth. If men will not upon our representations and persuasions receive the truth, we are, nevertheless, to consider them as our fellow-men; and, instead of injuring them in their worldly interests, to do them every office of kindness our circumstances will admit.

I will go farther, and add, that the laying fines and penalties even upon those who oppose the truth, or the being any way designedly instrumental to that end, is to offer an high affront and injury to the truth. The truth neither wants, nor is capable of receiving support from any such auxiliaries. These are arms which our Master has strictly forbidden us to use in our contention for the gospel. *His kingdom is not of this world a.* And *the weapons of our warfare*, says the apostle, *are not carnal, but spiritual b.* Nay, the taking up such weapons, or even countenancing the use of them in defence of the truth, is in effect betraying it, be the pretence what it will, into the hands of its enemies. For, in disputes about matters of religion, the presumption is usually in favour of the oppres-

a John xviii. 36. *b* 2 Cor. x. 4.

ed. We ought to take heed, therefore, how we hold up the ark with unhallowed hands, lest we should be the occasion of its falling; and beware how we call for fire from heaven on them that will not receive our Master, lest he turn and severely rebuke us. On the contrary, we are helping the truth, by nobly rejecting these ineffectual and wretched means of supporting it, and by doing what lies in our power to possess even the opposers of the truth of their natural rights and privileges. For so may we hope to spoil them of their boasting, and to have the honour ourselves, stripped of every carnal weapon, *by the word of truth, by the power of God, and by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left a*, to assail and subdue them.

Thirdly, Another way of helping the truth is, by properly stating and defending it.

By properly stating the truth I mean, the stating it truly, clearly and fully. The false colourings which some have given it, the absurdities with which others have loaded it, and the thick mists in which others have enveloped it, have shamefully disgraced it, confounded the minds of many about it, given rise to innumerable vain speculations, and so either involved men in all the heats of angry and useless contentions, or else laid them asleep in miserable indolence and security. Can it be enough lamented?—But there is, sirs, a noble simplicity in the gospel of Christ. And the grand truths of it, when stripped of all the fancies and imaginations of vain and foolish men, and held up in the artless and yet striking light in which the Scriptures have placed them, will not fail to approve themselves to the judgments and consciences of many. Thus publishing, thus declaring, thus stating the truth, *we shall be unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish. To the one the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life b.* And so shall we become helpers to the truth.

And then, by properly defending the truth, I mean the defending it by such arguments, and in such a manner as the nature, importance and dignity of it demand. Demonstration is not to be attempted, where only moral proof can be admitted,

a 2 Cor. vi. 7. *b* 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

Nor is a doctrine of pure revelation to be proved by the principles of natural religion. In our reasonings about the blessed God, the incomprehensibility of his nature should secure us from vainly attempting to throw light upon his essence, by any crude explanations and comparisons of our own; and, at the same time, make us acquiesce in what he has affirmed of himself, though our sensories are too weak to comprehend the object. And the infinite grandeur of *his* attributes should awe us into such reverence, as to forbid our hastily pronouncing upon *his* thoughts and ways, as we may be at liberty to do upon *our own*. Satisfied of the divine authority of the Scriptures, what is therein declared we should resolve meekly to receive, and stedfastly maintain; and, in the defence of these doctrines, we should invariably derive our arguments and reasonings from this unerring standard of truth.

Farther, in the management of our reasoning, confident that we have truth on our side, we should not call in to our aid the maxims, subtilties and arts of the schools; nor yet, on the other hand, disgrace our subject (the noblest in the world) by incoherent declamation, and a contempt of all method and precision. We help the truth, when we reason, as the apostles did, in a plain, sober and intelligible manner from the Scriptures; *not handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God* a. And we help it, when we do it the justice due to every truth, be it what it will, keep close to our subject, not digressing into a thousand impertinencies; support it by plain arguments, directed immediately to the point, and not by mere allegory, or the figments of our own imagination. We help it by aiming first to enlighten the understanding, and then move the passions; first to convince the judgment, and then rouse the conscience. Which leads me to the

Fourth mean by which we may help the truth, and that is, the offering suitable motives to engage men to a cordial reception and profession of it.

Here we have full scope for all the powers of imagination and eloquence. We may address all the feelings of the heart and passions of the breast, men's hopes and fears, desires and

a 2 Cor. iv. 2.

aversions, love of happiness and dread of misery, shame, jealousy, resentment, admiration and wonder, all the sensibilities of nature and conscience. By the terrors of the Lord we may persuade them, by the bowels of Christ intreat them, and by their own interests allure them.

The blessed God we may set before them in all the splendours of his infinite majesty and glory, bidding them *fear him, who can destroy both body and soul in hell* a. To Mount Sinai we may lead them, and there pronounce the holy law of God in their ears, amidst thunderings and lightnings, blackness and darkness, tempest and sound of trumpet. The scenes of Mount Calvary we may describe to them, shewing them the Son of God bleeding upon the cross, a sacrifice to injured justice for the sins of men. The triumphs of his death and resurrection we may display before their eyes, the powers of sin, and darkness, and death subdued, and captivity itself led captive. We may take them up into heaven, and shew them the pure joys, the ineffable delights, and transcendent glories of that happy place. We may predict the solemnities of the last day, sound in their ears the trumpet of the archangel, shew them the dead rising out of their graves, Jesus of Nazareth coming in the clouds of heaven to judge the world, the elements in a blaze, and the earth and all that is therein on fire. We may take them down into the mansions of the damned, point to them the horrors of that world, as described by our Saviour and his apostles, the pit that has no bottom, the fire that cannot be quenched, and the worm that never dieth.

We may reason with them on the infinite value of the soul, the ecstatic and refined joys it is capable of feeling, and the pungent and agonizing pains it is capable of enduring—on the malignity, turpitude and wretched deformity of sin, on the one hand; with all the shame, terror and despondency it brings after upon the awakened conscience—and on the intrinsic beauty, excellence and utility of true holiness, on the other; with the sweet calmness and serenity of a peaceful conscience, the satisfying pleasures resulting from the favour of God and communion with Heaven, the transforming and beautifying influence of the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart, and the

a Matt. x. 28.

joy, the confidence, the assurance, with which a well-grounded hope of heaven inspires the heart, amidst all the troubles of life, and in the immediate views of death. By these, and a great many other motives, *we may intreat and beseech men, in Christ's stead, to be reconciled unto God by him a.* And thus, in a humble dependence on the influence and grace of the Holy Spirit, may we become helpers to the truth. Again,

Fifthly, The truth is to be helped, by our adorning it with a holy life and conversation.

Nor is this the least, or most inconsiderable mean of helping the truth. For though the truth is the same, whether the lives of those who profess it be or be not conformable to its sacred dictates; yet so strong are men's prejudices against the gospel, that the objection of the scandalous lives of some professors (though it is, in fact, only the shadow of an objection) will not fail to be pressed into the service of infidelity and sin. Hence the apostle, with tears of anguish, deplores the conduct of such persons, pronouncing them *enemies of the cross of Christ b.* On the contrary, the exemplary lives of Christians not only tend to preclude this objection, but to fix upon the minds of inquirers that presumption in favour of the truth, which they may have received from our preaching.

How natural is it for such a person to reason thus with himself? "Yonder I see a man of a meek, humble, contented, patient and forgiving temper. He is honest in his dealings, sincere in his friendships, and true to his word. He is kind, sympathizing and benevolent. He does not eagerly pursue the world, resolving at all adventures he will possess it. The world is not his god: he does not worship it, he will not sacrifice his honour and conscience to it. He uses it, but does not abuse it. He is industrious, but not a slave. He is prudent, but not penurious; charitable, but not ostentatious. A tender parent, a dutiful son, an obedient servant, and a good member of society.—This man, I am told, is a Christian. He is a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth, and, having learned his doctrine, has attained to this temper. Sure then, the gospel of Christ is the truth." And thus, *falling down on his face, he*

a 2 Cor. v. 20. b Phil. iii. 18.

worships God, and reports that God is in these Christians of a truth a. O then let us be persuaded, in this manner, with all our might, to help the truth! Once more,

Sixthly and lastly, It is to be furthered and promoted, by our earnest prayers to God for his blessing on our endeavours.

We are all, I trust, convinced that the truth will not prevail, to the great purposes of the salvation of men, without the blessing of God, and the mighty energy of his grace. If, however, *we* are not convinced of it, the apostles were. Endowed as they were with the gifts of tongues, and the power of working miracles, they accounted themselves insufficient for these things, unequal to the great business of contending with men's lusts, and with the powers of darkness. *Paul may plant,* say they, *and Apollos water, but it is God that giveth the increase b.* Earnestly wishing therefore, from the love they bore to Christ and the souls of men, that the gospel might prevail, they poured out their daily and fervent prayers to God, for the concurrence of his grace with their labours. "Reveal, O Lord, thine arm; display thy mighty power, and let thy word have a free course and run, and be glorified." So they prayed, and went on praying to the end of their lives. And, as the truth is the same now it was then, the ends of its publication the same, and the promise of Christ the same, *Lo I am with you always c;* we have abundant encouragement to pray as the apostles did, and to strive together on those occasions in our prayers to God.

O, my brethren, there is a kind of omnipotence in prayer. *It availeth much d.* It hath a strength, force, energy in it, beyond what a vain world can at all imagine, and even beyond what our own unbelieving hearts will sometimes admit. It hath stopped the course of the sun, brought rain down upon the parched ground, restored the sick to health, and even raised the dead. Why may we not hope then to help the truth by our prayers? God is the God of truth. The truth originates from him. His honour is concerned in the maintenance and spread of it. He has said, it shall rise superior to all opposition, and that *the gates of hell shall not pre-*

a 1 Cor. xiv. 25. *b* 1 Cor. iii. 6.
c Matt. xxviii. 20. *d* James v. 16.

vail against it a. Let us then besiege the throne of his grace from all quarters, from the country and the city, from our closets, our families, and the church of God. Let us send up our incessant wishes to Heaven, in the name of our adorable Emmanuel, and resolve with the patriarch, so famed for his faith in prayer, *that we will not leave him except he bless us b.*

These then are the ways in which we are to help the truth. And we may be ALL helpers to it—all, whatever our talents and abilities, and whatever our stations in the world and the church of God may be.—Magistrates may help the truth. To preach it, indeed, is not their province, nor is it their province to preside in the church: but by protecting men in the enjoyment of their just and natural rights, and by discountenancing vice and profaneness, they may serve the cause of Christianity.—As to ministers, it is their professed business; and, indeed, it is the noblest, the most honourable, and most beneficent employment in the whole world. We are to help the truth by our private and public labours, by *studying to approve ourselves workmen that need not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth c;* by admonishing, expounding, preaching and praying; by being instant in season and out of season.—You, sirs, the people, are to help the truth, by assisting us in our endeavours. The rich, by contributing to spread the gospel in the several ways that have been mentioned; and the poor, by pouring upon it their most fervent good wishes. In short, we ought all to help it by our examples and prayers.—And we are to be FELLOW-HELPERS to the truth, join hearts and hands in this noble cause, by holy emulation provoke one another to love and good works, and by tender sympathy animate one another amidst all our discouragements. —And we are to go on helping the truth to the end, 'never weary of well-doing, in as much as we know that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord *d.*'

And now it remains,

THIRDLY, That I add some motives to persuade the friends and lovers of the truth, to apply themselves heartily to this great duty.

And here, where shall I begin? where shall I end? The

a Matt. xvi. 18. *b* Gen. xxxii. 26.
c 2 Tim. ii. 15. *d* Gal. vi. 9.—1 Cor. xv. 58.

field is too large to be ranged over. Arguments arise on every side, they pour upon us from every quarter: and each one of them has force enough in it, methinks, to rouse the sleepiest Christian, to stimulate the heart that is grown most cold and languid in the ways of religion. Here, had I time, I would argue,

First, From the native excellence of truth abstractedly considered.

Truth, such is the sweetness, beauty and majesty of her very countenance! whilst she has attracted the hearts of her friends, she has forced homage from her very enemies. The hands that would have sacrilegiously extirpated her from the earth, have yet dressed up error and falsehood in the pure attire she wears. Wicked as the world is, men will not worship error as error; they will not believe a lie, without a thousand arts first practised upon them, either by their own depraved hearts or by others, to persuade them it is truth. What is this but an acknowledgment of the native excellence of truth? Philosophers, some few of them in the heathen world, sought truth; all of them said they sought it. Fond of the name, though destitute of the thing, thousands assumed the character of lovers of the truth; and, indeed, the trifling attainment of a little mathematical demonstration, of scarce any consequence to mankind, made some of them almost run mad with joy. "I have found, I have found," cried the Syracusian philosopher, when he had solved a problem that might have remained so to this day, without, perhaps, any detriment to the world. Shall then Pagans, Mohammedans, Deists, all say they have the truth, aver that they are the lovers of it, and that they would even die for it; and we Christians, to whom truth has unveiled her lovely face, not be ambitious of this character in the highest degree, and be willing to sacrifice all for it?

Secondly, The dignity and authority of divine truth surpasses every thing that can be said in commendation of it.

The gospel of Christ has the broad seal of Heaven enstamped upon it. The grand doctrine of the Bible, *That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners* [a], is supported by a kind of evidence suited to its own intrinsic and marvellous excellence. *The great mystery of godliness, God manifest in the*

[a] 1 Tim. i. 15.

flesh a, is confirmed by wonders that none but a God could perform. Heaven, earth and hell bear witness to it. Patriarchs and prophets, through a long course of ages, foretel it: a whole nation of priests are consecrated to prepare the way for it: angels proclaim it: the dead arise from their graves to publish it: yea, the devils themselves, however reluctant, acknowledge it.—O! who would not, amidst all these striking proofs of the gospel, be ambitious of the honour of becoming helpers to it? Again,

Thirdly, The amazing display of divine love in the gospel, challenges our warmest efforts to spread and promote it.

Is it true, that the God against whose authority our whole species had risen up in arms, spared not his own Son, but gave him up even to death, to ransom and save us? Is it true, that the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person, the true God and eternal life, became a man, bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, and offered his life upon the cross a sacrifice to justice for our sins? Is it true, that through the mediation of Christ, the righteousness, truth and holiness of God, are become as friendly to us as his mercy, compassion and love? Is it true, that Christ has procured forgiveness for the chief of sinners, pardon for crimes of an enormous size, offences as numerous as the sands on the sea shore? Is it true, that by his obedience we are made righteous; that for the great love wherewith he hath loved us, we are quickened who were dead in trespasses and sin; that he hath conquered death and hell for us; that he is our advocate now in heaven; and, that he hath made us kings and priests unto God, and we shall reign with him for ever? Is this, all this, yea more than we can conceive of his goodness, true? and, ought we not, are we not constrained, urged, obliged, to become helpers to the truth?

Fourthly, The importance of it to men's present and everlasting interests, is an argument addressed to our compassion for our fellow-creatures, as was the former to our gratitude to Christ.

The salvation of an immortal soul is surely a matter of infinite moment. And *there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, but this of Christ b*

a 1 Tim. iii. 16. *b* Acts iv. 12.

They who remain strangers to religion fail of a thousand comforts and blessings in this life, which others enjoy; and, dying in impenitence and unbelief, fall short of inconceivable bliss and glory in heaven. Nay, what is worse, they stand exposed to a thousand evils here, and to inexpressible torments in the world to come. Is it not then, in effect at least, the voice of millions of immortal souls around us, *O be ye helpers to the Truth!* Again,

Fifthly, The arts and pains used by Satan and his emissaries to promote error and falshood, is an argument, I was going to say, addressed to our pride, at least, to our just resentment; to engage us with holy emulation in the service of the truth.

The old serpent, the devil, hath ever laboured with unwearied zeal in the cause of infidelity and sin. He has, by innumerable artful devices and unnatural cruelties, pushed forward his interests in our world; and his servants, true to the allegiance they bear to their sovereign, have supported his kingdom at the hazard of every thing that is most valuable in the present life, and that to come. They have great wrath, and, as their time is short, they exert their utmost efforts to compass their object—to subvert, if possible, the dominion of Christ in the world, and to enslave and ruin the souls of men. And should we not endeavour to counteract their designs, by fighting manfully under the banner of our Almighty Saviour? Should we not strive to outdo them in zeal, diligence and perseverance; and aim to serve our Prince more effectually than they do theirs? In fine,

Sixthly, The pleasure that accompanies a sincere endeavour to promote the truth, and the rewards promised us in another world, are arguments addressed to our interest; and methinks, therefore, cannot fail to have their effect.

O! what pleasure, what heart-felt pleasure must it afford us, to be instruments of saving one soul from perdition! How must the hope, even the probability of this, alleviate the toils and labours of our service for Christ, and add sweetness to those many comforts he has appointed us! And O! how will the rest, the joy, the triumph of heaven, infinitely more than compensate all our most painful exertions here on earth!—Let us, there-

fore, brethren, be persuaded to be fellow-helpers to the truth.

And if you are thus disposed, I am satisfied you will give me a patient, I should rather say, a cheerful hearing, whilst I lay before you a general account of that excellent institution, which I am desired now to recommend to your pious and charitable regards; I mean, that of the Incorporated Society for propagating Christian Knowledge, and promoting the arts of civil life, in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

This society has existed for near a century past: during which time its pious views have, indeed, been extended to foreign parts, encouraged by the liberal donations of some worthy persons deceased. Nor have their endeavours thus directed failed of success, as appears by the accounts they have received from abroad. But the principal object of the society, is the civilization and instruction of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland. And whoever considers the large extent of country under that description, the number of its inhabitants, their gross ignorance, and wretched poverty; and, what deserves particular attention, the unwearied endeavours of the emissaries of Rome to revive and promote the Popish interest among them: whoever, I say, considers these things, must acknowledge the great utility of this object to the Public in general, as well as to individuals.

The society are empowered by two Royal Charters to erect schools where they shall judge proper, for teaching children to read; and, particularly, for teaching them the English language, where hitherto the Erse has prevailed; for forming their morals, and instructing them in the principles of the Christian religion; and for bringing them up to husbandry, manufactures, or other useful trades. There are near eight thousand children of both sexes educated in these schools: and, to the honour of this respectable Society, I must observe, that they are not only concerned to have it in their power to support these schools, but are unwearied in their endeavours, by every prudent regulation and precaution, to prevent the abuse of them, and to render them effectual to the important ends proposed.

And they have had the happiness of seeing the success of their endeavours; for, with the blessing of God, the thick mists

of ignorance, which formerly overspread these parts, are now in some good measure dispelled, and the desirable fruits of industry and humanity begin to take place of that wretched indolence and barbarism which had for many years disgraced the Highlands. To which it must be added, that these improvements have had a happy effect to weaken the force, if not entirely root out, those slavish principles, and those predilections in favour of a Popish pretender, which have once and again threatened the existence of our excellent constitution, and the extirpation of the Protestant succession in the illustrious house of Brunswick.—An object to which, it is apprehended, this well directed charity hath more largely and effectually contributed, than even those wise and salutary laws, which were enacted at the close of the last rebellion, for abolishing their feudal tenures and hereditary jurisdictions.

But the advantage which has arisen from this charity to individuals, in regard of their spiritual and everlasting interests, is the best recommendation of this important institution, and the noblest reward of the unwearied pains which the Society have been at in the management of it. It may be truly affirmed of them, "that they have been helpers to the truth."

But, successful as the Society have been in their attempts to compass these great ends, and large as the donations have been which they have from time to time received, there remains yet a great deal to be done, and which cannot be effected without farther assistance. The advocates, I must again repeat it, of that most enormous and pernicious corruption of the Christian religion, Popery, are very numerous and indefatigable in those parts. Whoever reads over the account of the Society with attention, will be surprised to find what efforts those determined enemies of the truth use to counteract the design of this institution *a*. This consideration therefore will I hope, have its effect, in concurrence with those motives I have so largely insisted on in this discourse, to dispose you to a cheerful and liberal contribution on this occasion.

a There are in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, about twenty thousand Papists. They have two regularly established seminaries of learning. In one parish (South Uist) there are near three thousand people, about three hundred of whom only are Protestants.

Let me beseech you then, by your regard to order and subjection among mankind, which is of such importance to the good of society—by your love of civil and religious liberty—by your affection to the house of Hanover, and our excellent constitution—by your tender compassion for the immortal souls of men—and, especially, by the gratitude you feel to our Lord Jesus Christ, who has laid the foundation of the gospel in his most precious blood; let me beseech you to assist in every way you are able this great and good design. And, as you will feel a real pleasure in becoming "fellow-helpers" with this respectable Society to the Truth; so I have no doubt, that *what you thus do faithfully to the brethren and to strangers, who will bear witness of your charity a*, will not fail of meeting an ample reward in the great day of the Lord.

a 3 John v. 6.

NATIONAL CALAMITIES THE EFFECT OF DIVINE DISPLEASURE:

A

SERMON,

PREACHED ON OCCASION OF

THE GENERAL FAST,

FEBRUARY 21st, 1781.

NATIONAL CALAMITIES THE EFFECT OF DIVINE DISPLEASURE.

AMOS III. 6.——*Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?*

IT must strike every man, upon a moment's reflection, that the solemnities of this day can neither be pleasing to God, nor profitable to ourselves, if they are not accompanied with such repentance as shall have an influence on our future tempers and conduct. It is the duty, therefore, of those who take the lead in these services, to do their utmost, with the blessing of God, to persuade men to repent in earnest of their sins, and heartily set about a reformation of their lives. But these objects are not to be attained, unless we really feel the miseries which have befallen us, clearly perceive the hand of God in them, and are deeply sensible that our sins are the cause of them. There is evil, great evil, in the British empire—God hath done it—and our sins have provoked him to do it. To prove these truths beyond a doubt, and thereby to awaken you and myself to our duty, ere it be too late, is what I have now in view. And may God of his mercy crown the attempt with success!

These were the points, which in regard of Judah and Israel, the prophet Amos meant to establish in the text and context. *Shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?*

They now suffered great miseries, and they had still greater in prospect. The God of heaven had given them cleanness of teeth in all their cities, and want of bread in all their places. He had withholden rain from them, when there were yet three months to the harvest. He had smitten them with blasting and mildew: when their gardens, and their vineyards, and their fig-trees, and their olive-trees increased, the palmer worm had devoured them. He had sent among them the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: their young men he had slain with the sword, and had taken their horses, and had made the stink of

their camps to come up into their nostrils *a*.—These calamities were quickly to be followed with a tremendous earthquake, and with the invasion of an enraged adversary, who was to compass their land round about, bring down their strength from them, and spoil their palaces *b*. So the ten tribes were to be carried into captivity by the Assyrians, and totally dispersed. And in a course of time the Jews were to be led away captive to Babylon, and remain there seventy years.

Now all this evil the Lord did. A solemn truth this, and a truth which, circumstanced as these people were, nothing but the most extravagant infidelity could dispute. It is, however, affirmed over and over again, and in a great variety of ways. *Thus will* I DO *unto thee, O Israel: and because* I WILL DO *this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel c*. And the more deeply to impress their minds with the idea of the influence of divine Providence in these calamities, the prophet particularly recalls their attention to one remarkable fact, *that God had caused it to rain upon one city, and not upon another d*.

But what was the moral cause of these evils? It was their guilt. This, if not directly expressed in the text, is yet particularly affirmed, and largely commented upon in the context. *You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities e*.—Avarice and oppression, intemperance and luxury, irreligion and profaneness, accompanied with the most shameful dissipation and insensibility, were the reigning vices of the times. 'They turned judgment to wormwood, and left off righteousness in the earth. They afflicted the just, took a bribe, and turned aside the poor in the gate *f*.' 'They stored up violence and robbery in their palaces *g*.' By fornication, incest, and adultery they profaned the holy name of their God *h*. They were guilty of the grossest idolatry, and yet dared to sacrifice to the Lord *i*. 'They despised his law, and kept not his commandments *k*.' 'They hated him that rebuked them, and abhorred him that spake up-

a Chap. iv. 6, 7, 9, 10. *b* Chap. i. 1. iii. 11. *c* Chap. iv. 12.
d Chap. iv. 7. *e* Chap. iii. 2. *f* Chap. v. 7, 12.
g Chap. iii. 10. *h* Chap. ii. 7. *i* Chap. v. 22, 26.
k Chap. 4. ii.

rightly *a*.' And, all the while, 'they were at ease in Zion, and trusted in the mountain of Samaria *b*.' 'They lay upon beds of ivory, and stretched themselves upon their couches, and ate the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall. They chanted to the sound of the viol, and invented to themselves instruments of music like David. They drank wine in bowls, and anointed themselves with the chief ointments: but they were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph *c*.' In a word, 'they put far away the evil day; yea, they boldly said, the evil shall not overtake nor prevent us *d*.'

Such was the dissipated, immoral, and profane character of this wretched people. And such were the calamities which their accumulated and unrepented guilt drew down upon them. Would to God there were no resemblance between their character and ours! Would to God we had no reason to apprehend the like miseries they suffered! If there be, however, any ground for the comparison, it is unquestionably our duty, interest, and wisdom, seriously to consider these three most important and awakening truths—There is evil in the British empire—God hath done it—Our sins have provoked him to do it.

First, Great and many are the evils which have befallen us.

The truth of this proposition all will acknowledge, though few, it is to be feared, are duly affected with it. Alas! Whilst many among us take the utmost pains, some to exaggerate and others to lessen our calamities, purely with a view to support the political opinions they have adopted, there is but one here and there who so considers, so feels them, as clearly to perceive that they originate from the just displeasure of almighty God. But, Sirs, the feelings we wish this day to excite are such, and such only, as are influenced by considerations of humanity and religion. Standing as we now do in the presence of the great Governor of the world, at whose hands we have been imploring mercy, we must dismiss a vain, frivolous, contentious spirit, forget the more immediate instruments or causes of our miseries, and be content, by realizing the resentments of Heaven against our sins, to chasten ourselves before God.

a Chap. v. 10. *b* Chap. vi. 1.
c Chap. vi. 4—6. *d* Chap. vi. 3. ix. 10.

War, especially when kindled within a nation and among the subjects of the same empire, is usually followed with the most ruinous consequences. It affects all sorts of persons, from the prince on the throne to the meanest peasant, extends its influence to the remotest parts of the community, and insinuates its corrosive and poisonous effects into all the concerns and enjoyments of life. It is to the body politic what diseases are to the natural body; defaces its beauty, wastes its strength, subdues its vigour, and, if it proceed to the utmost lengths, dissolves the very constitution itself. Under the frowns of war the arts and sciences languish, trade and manufactures decline, the wealth and opulence of a people are consumed, and their weight and influence among neighbouring powers are lost. It obstructs the regular course of justice, throws down the laws, those sacred fences of society, opens the avenues to fraud, oppression, and rapine, and destroys that subordination among mankind, which is of the last consequence to their honour, happiness, and safety.

Government is an ordinance of God for the good of men: but war, the kind of war of which we are here speaking, weakens the springs of government, and tends to the total subversion of it. It confounds those distinctions among men which God and nature have established, wrests the power from the hands to which reason, justice, and the consent of the community have entrusted it, interdicts the mutual offices of protection and obedience between the magistrate and the subject, and, if it proceed to the extremities to which the lawless passions of men would precipitate it, buries in one common grave both the honour and authority of the state, and the rights and liberties of the people.

But the miseries it brings upon individuals deserve our more particular attention, in order to excite those feelings which are necessary to beget national repentance and humiliation; the only object I have in view in painting these sad scenes before your eyes. Intestine broils and animosities interrupt the friendly intercourse of society. They embitter men's spirits towards each other, and induce an eager wild fierceness of manners, which can scarce consist with the common principles of good nature and benevolence. They create the most sullen jea-

lousies, inveterate prejudices, and rancorous resentments. They spoil the peace of families, neighbourhoods, and whole provinces. Nay, what is far worse, they make horrid inroads on the sacred rights of religion and conscience. The din of war disturbs the silent pleasures of devotion; and good men tremble while they see religious prejudices mingling themselves with political disputes, and, which is still more shocking, behold men on all sides becoming advocates with God against each other, and daring to profane his holy altar with their cruel anathemas.

How great a matter does a little fire kindle! And how deplorable the sight, to see the infatuated multitude throwing oil upon the spreading flames, amidst all the attempts of wisdom and humanity to extinguish them! When civil discord arises to this height, the scene is almost too horrible to be described. The powers of invention are now racked to procure the instruments of death and destruction. The standard is erected on each side, and thousands crowd to it, impelled with all the desperate fury of revenge, and all the stubborn confidence of victory. They prepare for battle, and, amidst the loud peals of thundering artillery, the dismal clangour of arms, and the shouts of opposing squadrons, rush on to the attack. Death now rides on his pale horse, hell following with him. The relentless sword is bathed in vengeance. Multitudes are hurried instantly into eternity, whilst, others with unavailing shrieks and groans languish and expire. The ground is stained with the blood of thousands, the plain covered over with mangled corpses, and the grave itself, well nigh satiated, begins to cry, It is enough.

Who? O who can forbear to weep amidst these scenes? Or if our hearts still remain callous, let us retire from this aceldema, this field of blood, to the gloomy habitations of the widow and fatherless, if indeed their habitations escape, and refuse to feel with them if we can. See the silent tear trickling down the eyes of helpless widows and orphans, or else the anguish of the throbbing heart forcing the bitterest exclamations from their lips. See whole families exterminated, the tenderest ties of nature dissolved, the fair hopes of succeeding generations extinguished, the fruits of honest labour blasted,

and scarce any thing entailed upon posterity but poverty and wretchedness, together with the history of infernal discord, brutality, and revenge, written in letters of blood.

And now, Is this description applicable in any degree to the present war? It is. O may our hearts bleed while we relate the sad story!—It began in suspicion and jealousy, gathered strength from misapprehension and prejudice, and proceeded to rancour and resentment. It hath drawn forces into the field, and armaments on the seas of a magnitude scarce known to former times. It hath precipitated infinite numbers of souls into an eternal world. It hath reduced the once happy and flourishing colonies to beggary, and consumed the wealth of the parent state to a degree that affects the feelings of every individual. It hath created such divisions among us, as have relaxed the nerves of government, and threatened the very existence of decency, order, and subjection. The powers of France and Spain, perfidious and haughty to a proverb, have united against us. Their fleets have insulted our coasts: and, whilst they have ignominiously forborne to fight, they have left no measure untried to protract the dispute to the ruin of those whom they would be thought to support, as well as of this country upon which they have insolently denounced vengeance. The flames of war have extended yet farther.—Riots of the most daring kind (whatever may have been the cause) and conducted in the most unexampled manner, have been excited to the horror of all in our metropolis. The West India islands have been laid waste by a most tremendous hurricane.—In fine, a gloomy imagination, amid these sad scenes, would be apt to suppose, that God is about to say, as he once did by the prophet Zephaniah, 'Wait ye upon me until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms to pour upon them my indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be destroyed with the fire of my jealousy *a*.'

And now, Ought we not to feel? Can it be pious, can it be virtuous, can it be humane, not to feel? Is it, in short, consistent with common honesty to assemble together, as we do this day, professedly on occasion of these calamities, and yet re-

a Zeph. iii. 8.

main totally stupid? True, indeed, we are at a remote distance from most of these scenes. Our ears do not hear the hoarse sound of war. Our eyes do not behold garments rolled in blood. We are in peace, each sitting under his own vine and fig-tree, none daring to make him afraid. And, great as the expence is which this war hath entailed on us, it is not felt in the degree that might be imagined, if we may judge by the luxury and dissipation which almost universally prevail among us. But, are these reasons why we should suppress all emotion of heart for the many innocent thousands, who are involved in the horrors of this desolating judgment? O, no. Cursed be the self-love that tears humanity from the breast, and annihilates all bowels of compassion. Let us, my brethren, feel, or cease to be Christians, cease to be men.

Insensibility, however, hath too strikingly marked our character hitherto. When we fasted and mourned in the four or five former years of this war, *Did we at all fast unto the Lord a?* On the contrary, *Have not the harp, and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine been in our feasts? Ah! we have not regarded the work of the Lord, nor considered the operation of his hands b.* But if we are resolved to be still thoughtless and dissipated, to be still insensible to our own interests, and those of our posterity, God will, in his own time, perhaps quickly, make us feel. These things, I say, not merely for the purpose of giving you pain: that would be inhuman. Much less with a view to fan the flame of popular contention, or to rouse your resentments against the authors of these evils: that would be criminal, highly criminal on the present occasion especially. Not to say how humiliating it would be to the majesty of religion, to descend to a discussion of political questions, in a place sacred to the sublime duties of communion with the Deity. No. My view is to prepare you by these impressions, to receive, with all becoming seriousness, that weighty truth which we proceed now to consider,

Secondly, That all this hath happened by the permission, and through the influence of divine Providence.

Until we feel the scourge we shall not trouble ourselves about the hand that inflicts it. But we do feel. Now is the

a Zech. vii. 5. b Isa. v. 12.

time, therefore, to address you in the language of our text. "Is there evil in the *British empire*, and the Lord hath not done it?" Few, I persuade myself, are so hardened as absolutely to deny the truth of this proposition: yet few, it is to be feared, are duly impressed with it. Permit us then to draw aside the veil of sense, and to fix your attention a moment to that great Being who, drest in all the horrors of just indignation against our sins, deigns himself by these calamities to address us. *His voice cries, and cries aloud: the man of wisdom will hear it. O that we were all men of wisdom! O that we all knew the rod, and him who hath appointed it a!*

The hand of God in these matters is capable of the clearest proof. The evidence is so strong, that only a glance at it must produce conviction. It is the language of reason and Scripture: it hath the consent of all wise and good men: and it receives abundant confirmation from the observations, which every pious and thoughtful mind must have made upon our own history.

It is the language of reason. If there be a God, and if he hath created the world, (and no one surely in his senses will deny it) it follows, that *that* God upholds and governs it. He is infinitely able, and it is by no means beneath him, so to do. Nay, the supposition that he does not govern the world, or that he concerns not himself at all about it, involves in it the most glaring absurdities. A doctrine this as uncomfortable as it is unreasonable: friendly indeed to the iniquitous views of bad men, but pregnant with every imaginable evil to society. It is a certain fact, therefore, that a divine energy pervades every part of the creation, that all the infinitely diversified orders of beings around us, and we ourselves too, are at the disposal, and under the controul and influence of him who made us. And though mankind, as intelligent and reasonable creatures, are amenable for their actions to the supreme judge of the world; yet their actions, whether good or bad, are all by his over-ruling influence made to subserve the great purposes of his glory, and the final completion of the grand scheme of Providence. We may be assured then that no events, prosperous or calamitous, happen to individuals, much less to

[a] Mic. vi. 9.

public bodies of men, but under the superintendence of the supreme and all-wise governor of the world.

This, too, is the clear and express language of Scripture. That venerable book, written by the divine pen, while it tells us that God hath created the earth, and given it to the children of men, assures us also, 'that he judgeth in the earth, and is governor among the nations; that he doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What dost thou *a*?' And when he condescends himself to address us, it is with a simplicity and yet dignity of language that cannot fail, methinks, to impress this great truth on our minds, 'I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me. I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil; I the Lord do all these things *b*. I am God, my counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure *c*.'. And how natural the reflection of Elihu! 'When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble? and when he hideth his face, who then can behold him? whether it be done against a nation, or against a man only *d*.' But it were endless to cite all the passages in our bible in which this important doctrine is held up to our view.

Indeed it hath had the consent of all wise and good men in every age of the world. The Pagans themselves, however miserably their theology was distorted with the idle figments of their own vain imagination, yet acknowledged the superintendence of a Providence in human affairs. And, difficult as it hath been to fix the attention of mankind to this great truth, through the wretched depravity of their hearts, yet there have been few, comparatively speaking, who have dared to assert and maintain the contrary doctrine. And the few who have done so, have been justly held in contempt for their folly, whilst they have been looked upon with horror for their impiety.

But this divine truth, so consonant with reason and common sense, receives abundant confirmation from a careful review of the principal events recorded in history: especially when we take into our account the moral character of the several ages in which they happened, the important consequences which in a

a Psal. lviii. 11. xxii. 28.—Dan. iv. 35. *b* Isa. xlv. 5, 7.
c Chap. xlvi. 9, 10. *d* Job xxxiv. 29.

course of time they drew after them, and, most of all, the relation they bore to the express predictions of Scripture. This argument, I am sensible, will not have its full effect, till the final consummation of all things, when the scheme of Providence respecting this world shall be completed. The wisdom of God in adjusting the several parts of this great plan, his power in carrying them into execution, and the grand intent of the whole, will then be clearly understood; and, of consequence, we shall then have the most striking and illustrious proofs of his influence in human affairs. But these proofs we cannot have till that period arrives. In the mean time, however, history throws so much light upon some distinct and separate parts of the plan, as sufficiently to justify the inference, that a wise and powerful Providence governs the world. When I view a curious piece of mechanism in its finished and perfect state, I have at once the fullest proof of the agency and skill of the artist: but, in the mean while, a view only of some few of its movements, in the relation they bear to each other, furnishes me with a sufficient evidence that it is the product, not of chance, but design.

Who then that considers the principal events that happened to the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman empires, considers them with the lights just now mentioned, but must clearly perceive the influence of divine Providence in them? And surely that influence no one who believes his bible can fail of observing in the administration of the affairs of the Jewish kingdom, from the beginning of its existence to the coming of the Messiah. But the history of our own country will sufficiently confirm and illustrate this grand point. Let us advert a moment to two or three instances among many others.

The amazing concurrence of circumstances, passions, and interests which brought about the Reformation; and the political grounds upon which the profession of the Protestant religion was established, whereby the temporal emolument of the principal families in this kingdom became a lasting and powerful security to it against the attempts of the Bishop of Rome; these very marvellous circumstances can scarce be reflected upon, without obliging us to acknowledge that the hand of God was in the matter. Nor can we fail of perceiving the same influence

exerted in the most striking manner, at the ever memorable æra of the Revolution. It was felt and acknowledged at the instant that almost miraculous deliverance took place, and when men's minds were in a disposition to be affected with it: and it hath received farther confirmation from the lights which later times have thrown upon the transactions of that period; by which it appears, that contrary interests, views, and passions became strangely subservient to that great event. And, on the other hand, most of the calamities which have befallen this country, in the various stages of its history, have been attended with circumstances which clearly point out the interference of divine Providence. The calamities themselves, the more immediate causes of them, the vices they were adapted to correct and punish, and the important consequences which in a course of time they drew after them, all abundantly justify this observation.

Can we then be so stupid, so impious, as to imagine, that the great God is an idle spectator of the miseries we this day deplore; and that they are no way under his direction, influence, and controul? I hope not. Could we place ourselves at the same distance from our own times, which we are now at from those just adverted to, this truth would perhaps strike us in a more clear and convincing manner than it does at present. But it is wise, truly wise, to observe the hand of God at the instant it is stretched out against us. Nor does his influence in these evils at all exculpate those who are the immediate authors of them. Our business, however, at present is not with them. It is in the presence of Almighty God we now stand: his voice we are this day called upon to hear, his hand we are this day called upon to observe.

We may be assured then, from the plain dictates of reason and revelation, that all the various passions, views, and interests of men, and all the infinitely diversified circumstances which do any way contribute to bring ruin upon a country, causes innocent and criminal, open and secret, gradual and transient in their operation, within the reach of human foresight and restraint or otherwise, all these causes, all these circumstances, I say, take effect by the permission, under the controul, and with the influence and direction of the great Arbiter of the universe. He exercises sovereign authority over all creatures animate and

inanimate, all the productions of nature and art, all the force of human skill and strength, and all the instruments of death and destruction. They receive their commission from him, and punctually execute his commands. Nor are the main springs of human affairs, which are generally remote from public view, less subject to his dominion. The eye of God pierces the inmost recesses of men's hearts, and penetrates into all their counsels, combinations, and resolutions. Their misapprehensions, false reasonings, mistaken informations, prejudices, jealousies, avarice, lust of power, resentments, malevolence, and revenge, he makes, though they are utterly repugnant to his all-perfect nature, the obedient executioners of his will.

Can we think of all this, can we believe all this, and not tremble?—tremble amidst the view we have been taking of the calamities we now deplore. The God of heaven, who made this world and governs it in truth and equity, whose counsel shall stand, and whose power none can controul; this great and terrible God is risen from his seat, hath whet his glittering sword, and hath taken hold of vengeance. He is come forth to contend with us. *Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.* Let every subject of the British empire, both at home and abroad, hear the summons, and obey.

But wherefore doth he contend with us? That is the next enquiry. Let us then, as was proposed, endeavour

THIRDLY, To impress our hearts with a deep sense of our manifold sins, which are the moral causes of all the miseries we suffer.

But before we proceed to enumerate the vices which prevail through this great empire, let us spend a moment upon the important question of the influence which the moral character of a people hath upon their welfare. If God be the governor of the world, if he hath given men plain laws for the regulation of their conduct, and hath annexed sanctions to them, it follows, that sin, which is a violation of those laws, must sooner or later bring after it punishment. There is no separating the ideas. But I am not here speaking of men in their individual capacity; and therefore need not take up your time in solving that seeming difficulty, which has often puzzled some minds, How it is that in many instances the wicked prosper and the

virtuous suffer? Let it suffice to observe, that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world, and that the solemn decisions of that day will effectually silence all atheistical reflections, and fully establish the proposition we have laid down in the whole extent of it, that sin will, must bring after it punishment.

But the question before us respects mankind in their collective capacity, as forming distinct communities, states and empires. In these views they are dealt with judicially in the present life, and for this plain reason, because they cannot be thus proceeded against in another, these relations then totally ceasing. That great truth, therefore, which Scripture so clearly asserts, *That righteousness exalteth a nation, and sin is a reproach and destruction to any people a*, is no other than the light of nature teaches, reason approves, and the common sense and feelings of mankind attest. And it is a truth, too, which all the great striking events, that stand recorded both in sacred and profane history, abundantly confirm. God is indeed slow to wrath, whence it often happens that national guilt rises to a great height, before the just sentence of his wrath is executed upon it: but, when the measure of it is filled up, judgment no longer tarries. At that awful period divine Providence makes that destruction inevitable, which men's vices, by their own natural operation, had been a long while bringing upon them. Such was the fate of the old world. Such was the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. Such hath been the fate of particular kingdoms; and such the fate of all the great monarchies, which make so distinguished a figure in the annals of fame. Read their history, and separate their public character and final doom if you can. But the story of the Israelitish nation, through a long series of years, is at large recorded in our bibles on purpose to illustrate this grand point. Their prosperity, we find, ever kept pace with their national virtue; and in all the calamities that from age to age befel them, down to the dreadful catastrophe of their final destruction, we see their sin written with indelible characters in their punishment.

This solemn truth then, that whatever evils befal a people they are the just and natural consequences of their sins, is

a Prov. xiv. 34.

proved, I persuade myself, to a demonstration. And in this light the present calamity is to be considered. But at the same time it is to be remembered, that one calamity is often sent as a warning of others yet more terrible impending, unless averted by timely repentance and reformation: in which case there is a mixture of mercy with judgment. The great God, in such visitations, deigns to expostulate with men ere he proceeds to extremities. And his authoritative, but mild and gentle language is this, 'At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it: if that nation against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them. And at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom to build and to plant it: if it do evil in my sight that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them *a*.'

This being the case, it is our indispensable duty, as we tender the honour of God and the real welfare of our country, to contribute all in our power towards the effecting a general repentance and reformation. To which purpose let us spend a few moments in taking an estimate of the present times, I mean the moral state of the British empire. I am aware that this is a difficult, as well as unpleasing task; and the rather, as too many are disposed to treat what is said upon these occasions in the light of mere popular declamation. But, God forbid! that we should be intimidated from our duty by apprehensions of this sort.

Every just and reasonable concession ought to be made to the prejudices of mankind, the better to secure their attention. Let all appeals to the passions, then, be withdrawn, while the character of the present age is tried at the bar of impartial truth. Be it admitted, that there is no nation under heaven, nor ever was, exempt from public vices. Be it admitted, that some good men, as Solomon complains, are too prone petulantly to enquire, *What is the cause that the former days were better than these b?* Be it farther admitted, that there are periods to be fixed upon in our own history, in which some vices were more prevalent than in the present. Let it also be acknowledged to the ho-

a Jer. xviii. 7—10. *b* Eccl. vii. 10.

nour of this age, that public charities, whatever may have been the motive, have received more countenance and encouragement for the last half century than any before. It will likewise be granted, that a liberal way of thinking, respecting the rights of conscience in matters of religion, hath got the better of the stubborn and unnatural prejudices of former times. And I will add, which is matter of infinite joy, that there are yet many among us who truly fear God, and are patterns of sobriety and virtue. All this may and ought to be acknowledged: whilst at the same time we do not overlook those increasing advantages of light and knowledge we derive from the history and experience of former ages, and that national prosperity with which, for a course of years previous to this war, we were distinguished.

And now this said, I am at liberty, without the hazard of being charged with partiality, to reverse the scene, and hold up to your view the horrid guilt which as a nation we have contracted, with the heinous aggravations of it.

Atheism and infidelity usually take the lead in an enumeration of public vices. And it is well known to those who are conversant in the literary world, that scepticism, in the affected habit of modest diffidence, hath of late years obtruded upon us opinions which directly tend to destroy all distinction between good and evil, to tear up the foundations of moral virtue, and to deprive men of the powerful restraints which natural religion lays upon their consciences. Nor have these laboured essays of false philosophy, absurd as they are, failed of meeting with considerable success among many in superior life, who wish to preserve a consistency between their opinions and practices. Whilst Heaven is thus insulted, and the interests of society invaded, what serious sensible man but must suffer pain for the dishonour offered to the one, and the mischief done the other?

To the Christian his religion is the most invaluable blessing he enjoys; and though he is not apprehensive of its being wrested from him by the open assaults of infidelity, yet he cannot but deeply feel for the injury that may be done to unwary minds, as well as for the affront that hath been offered to the great author of his noblest hopes, by the insidious attacks which have lately been made upon it. Nor is it to be enough lamented, that too many who admit the divine authority of

Scripture, have by their false reasonings thrown a veil over the distinguishing glories of the gospel, and taken pains to reduce Christianity to a system of mere morality. Whilst others, in all the wantonness of unmeaning enthusiasm, have so treated the great truths of religion, as if they judged it the highest honour they could do them, to set them at variance with the dictates of common sense. But, whatever ill influence this various treatment of Scripture may have had upon the minds of men, whether more or less, it is evident beyond a doubt, that the evil practices of which atheism and infidelity must ever be considered as the ablest patrons and defenders, prevail far and wide.

And now, What, in regard of manners, is the true and proper character of this country? Let any man look around him a moment, and he will not be at a loss for a reply. It is, AN INSATIABLE THIRST FOR PLEASURE. This fatal evil hath long prevailed among us, but hath now spread its baleful influence through all orders of men. It hath for a course of years operated like slow poison upon the constitution, by degrees corrupting the blood, and wasting the strength: but it now makes a rapid progress to the vitals, and threatens, if not speedily checked, destruction to our very existence. The symptoms of this sad disease are too many to escape the notice of a common observer, and the effects of it are felt through the whole empire.

Not to speak of those numerous and deplorable instances of intrigue and seduction, lewdness and debauchery, adultery and divorce, intemperance and luxury, which are notorious to all the world: what daily, hourly proofs have we, wherever we go, with whomsoever we converse, and whatever businesses we are employed about, of the idle, vain, frivolous cast of the times! The prodigious resort of people to the metropolis, merely for the purpose of dissipation; the new entertainments imported at a prodigious expence from foreign countries, and countries too whose national characters we were used to hold in contempt; the vast variety of fashionable amusements, as they are called, particularly masquerades; the houses of pleasure planted in all parts of the town; the kind of publications every where greedily received; and, I may add, the very dress of the people, all prove it. There are infinite numbers among us, whose time, ingenuity, strength, health, substance, and all

are exhausted in the restless pursuit of this wretched Demon of pleasure, yea, truth, virtue, conscience, and every thing sacred and venerable among men, are sacrificed to it. Satiated with one species of gratification, invention is racked to find out another. And, eager to outvie those above them in splendour and gaiety, no means, however base and unworthy, are neglected or foregone to acquire the objects of their ambition. Hence that venality and corruption, that mad spirit of gaming, that fraud and oppression, that violence and rapine which abound among us. Hence those licentious inroads which are made on all order and decency in society, contempt of magistracy, slander and defamation, duelling and suicide, and frequent failures among men of trade and business. Of these evils, too, it is deserving of particular remark, that some of them are not accounted criminal, but rather considered as innocent and reputable; that most of them prevail among all ranks of men; and that all of them are committed with an effrontery scarce known in former times. Many instances might be adduced as proofs and illustrations of these charges: but we must not enter into particulars—the sad detail would carry us too far *a*.

Such, in regard of social manners, being the character of the times, the masculine sense and virtue derived to us from our ancestors having been enervated, the ties of humanity weakened if not dissolved, and the barriers of public decorum thrown down, is it to be wondered that, in respect of the duties we owe more directly to the great God, a flood of impiety and profaneness is come in upon us? Is it to be wondered, that swearing, perjury, contempt of divine ordinances, and a total disregard among

a One instance, however, must not be omitted, as the case is of a public kind, and the guilt most atrocious; I mean, the horrid sacrifices which have been made for a course of years past, in our East-India settlements, to this cursed lust of wealth and pleasure. Posterity will shudder when they are told, that an immense number of lives have been wantonly spent in the service of lawless ambition and insatiable avarice. This national sin, written with bloody characters in the book of God's remembrance, remains there, I fear, unblotted out: whilst we feel the effects of it in the miserable abuse of those prodigious treasures of ill-gotten wealth which have been imported hither. And what are those depredations, which have of late been committed in such abundance upon our roads and in our houses, and which have bid defiance to all the exertions of magistracy, but so many imitations of those greater and more desperate robberies we have been speaking of?

great multitudes of people to the worship of God, are become fashionable? Irreligion is the great source of all the vices just mentioned; wherefore in proportion as piety declines, immorality will always prevail.

And this naturally leads us to bring matters home to ourselves, and seriously to enquire, How far we have contributed to this enormous load of guilt that lies upon our country? We, Protestant Dissenters, are bound by our profession to a peculiar regularity and strictness of manners. We enjoy the most invaluable liberties—liberties which have not been infringed, and which, however all good subjects are entitled to them, our ancestors were denied: and liberties, too, which have lately been confirmed and enlarged. We are obliged, therefore, by motives of duty and interest, to demean ourselves with all reverence and gratitude to the great God, attention and deference to our governors, and integrity and benevolence towards one another. We have the ever blessed gospel preached among us, the ordinances duly administered to us, and frequent and warm admonitions to our duty.

But, permit me to ask, Are these advantages acknowledged and improved, or slighted and abused by us? Let us in the fear of God ask ourselves, Do we make conscience of private devotion? Do we maintain religion in our families? Do we regularly attend the places of worship to which we belong? Do we instruct our children and our servants in their duty? Do we set them examples of piety, justice, and sobriety? Do we, or do we not, conform to the manners of the times? Is it our aim and endeavour to subdue in our breasts the love of the world, and to promote, as far as our abilities will admit, the interests of religion, virtue, and benevolence among all around us?—Ah! my brethren, I fear, some of us can give but poor answers to these questions, and, am well persuaded, there are none of us but are more or less defective. And how sad, how tremendous must their reflections be on this occasion, if conscience does its office, who have in a public and gross manner violated their vows, and brought a scandal upon their profession!—Our sins, then, make up a part of that guilt for which God is contending with us. Indeed we have all sinned, our princes, our nobles, our magistrates, the ministers of religion, and men of all ranks and conditions among us. *The whole head is sick, and the*

whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it a.

But there is one circumstance more of a very threatening kind that must be added, and that is, the inattention of men in general to the influence of divine Providence in our affairs; and to that accumulated guilt we have been describing, which hath brought these miseries upon us. Alas! how few, amidst the warmth with which they enter into questions of a political kind, do at all advert to the hand of God, or are at all grieved for the impieties which abound among us? We can hear of the confederacies of foreign powers against us, of the blood of thousands shed in battle, of whole countries laid waste by tremendous tempests, and of the most alarming riots in our metropolis; and all the while be deaf to the authoritative language of the text, *The Lord hath done it*, and deaf to the voice of reason and conscience, *Your sins have provoked him to do it.* It was the complaint of the prophet Jeremiah, respecting the Jews, *No man repented him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done b?* And is not the like complaint too applicable to us, if not to every individual, yet to the people of this country in general? We know how in all the heat of resentment to say, of our enemies, of those in authority over us, of the various differing political parties among us, of the Established Church and of Dissenters, of the several denominations of Christians, of the ministers of religion, and they again of the people, "What have THEY done?" But ah! we know not how to frame our lips, or how to find it in our hearts, each one to say to himself, "What have I done?"

And now, taking all these considerations into view, must we not, will we not admit, that we have every imaginable cause for humiliation? With such an enormous load of guilt upon us, infinitely beyond that of our national debt, do we not feel ourselves oppressed? Under the awful apprehensions of divine resentment, do we not tremble? Look upwards, behold the angel of justice standing before the throne of God, see him holding up to the view of omniscience the long scroll of our national sins, and thus pleading against us—"How long, O God, holy, just and true, ere thou wilt avenge thyself of this ungrateful, perverse, and rebellious people! Arise in thine indignation, and scatter these thine enemies. Let pestilence, famine, tempest,

a Isa. i. 5, 6. b Jer. viii. 6.

and sword devour them. Tear up the very foundations of their glory, happiness, and safety. Spread desolation through their whole empire. And let surrounding nations know, amidst the terrors of thy justice, that thou art God."

What, O what, my brethren, shall we say? Is there no faithful Abraham, no friend of God, to plead for us?—Yes, I trust there yet is, even the angel of mercy himself, with whom Abraham interceded for Sodom. The divine Jesus, whose character hath been insulted, and whose religion hath been neglected and despised among us, hath still, I hope, compassion for this country. O may his cries prevail against the demands of justice!

But can we hope for so great a boon as this, whilst we remain totally impenitent and unreformed? This, this is the point to which all we have been saying hath been directed. O may we be persuaded, by the terrors and by the mercies of God, by our duty and by our interest, by a concern for our own happiness and that of our posterity, to repent and reform! Let us, each one, set about this great work in earnest, and in a dependence upon the grace of God. 'Let us break off our sins by righteousness, and our iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor, if it may be a lengthening of our tranquillity *a*.' 'Let us fear God, and honour the king *b*.' 'Let us be subject to the higher powers, and that not only for wrath, but also for conscience-sake. Let us render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute, custom to whom custom is due *c*.' Let us lead peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty, cherishing in our breasts the warmest gratitude to God, and a due sense, too, of the obligations we owe to our civil governors, for the invaluable blessings of religious liberty we enjoy. And, whilst we are labouring by our influence and example, to promote union and reformation among all around us, Who knows but the British empire may yet arise out of the present calamity into its former prosperous and happy state? Who knows but songs of joy and praise may succeed to the tears of genuine contrition and sorrow, we have this day poured out before God?

a Dan. iv. 27. *b* 1 Pet. ii. 17. *c* Rom. xiii. 6, 7.

END OF OCCASIONAL DISCOURSES.

For the following Letter, which has never before appeared in print, the Publishers are indebted to the kindness of *Edward Phillips, Esq.* of Grosvenor Terrace, Bath, who married Dr. Stennett's only daughter, in whose possession it has remained since the death of her honoured parent.

LETTER from Mr. HOWARD to Dr. STENNETT, referred to p. 295, of this volume.

Smyrna, Aug. 11th, 1786.

DEAR SIR,

I take the liberty to write, as I hope a few lines from your wandering friend will not be unacceptable; My plan in collecting the Rules and Orders and Drafts of the principal Lazarettos in Europe, with the medical treatment of Patients in the Plague being my principal object; I doubt not but you remember I mentioned when I last had the pleasure of seeing you; but not being satisfied with the answers the Physicians gave to my questions, I soon determined to visit the hospitals in Turkey, and to converse with some of those few who had the courage to visit such patients. Some months I have been in this country; I propose myself performing quarantine at Venice. I go out with a foul bill of health, which I prefer, as I shall experience the strict quarantine of 42 days: but I bless God, my calm spirits and steady resolution has not yet forsaken me.

But, Sir, the principal reason of my writing is most sincerely to thank you for the many, many pleasant hours I have had in reviewing the notes I have taken of the Sermons I had the happiness to hear under your ministry; these, Sir, with many of your petitions in prayer, have been, and are, the songs in the house of my pilgrimage.

With unabated pleasure I have attended your ministry; no man ever entered more into my religious sentiments, or more happily expressed them: it ever was some little disappointment when any one occupied your pulpit: Oh, Sir, how many sabbaths have I ardently longed to spend in Wild Street; on those days I generally rest, or if at sea, keep retired in my little cabin; it is you that preach; and I bless God I attend with renewed pleasure; God in Christ is my rock, the portion of my soul. I have little more to add, but, accept my renewed thanks. I bless God for your ministry; I pray God reward you a thousand fold; my friend, you have an honourable work, many seals you have to your ministry; your very valuable life I trust

will be prolonged, as with sincere affection and great esteem I shall ever remain

Dear Sir,

Your obliged Friend and Servant,

(Signed) JOHN HOWARD.

P. S. My best compliments wait on Mrs. Stennett and son. I was at Constantinople a month; a person informed me that a fortnight before my arrival the grand Vizier had examined the biscuit of the Janisaries, and finding it deficient in weight and quality, ordered the Contractor to come before him; his excuse not being satisfactory, on his return, he sent immediately and cut off his head in the street, there to remain under the arm of the corpse three days, having some of the biscuits placed before him, and a label on his breast: It being very hot weather, I said it was impossible to remain three days in the middle of the street; yes it did, said he, for our three days may only be five or six and twenty hours; if one half hour before sun set, we ever call it a day, and so if half an hour after sun rise, it is another day. My mind reverted to the glorious event that is our joy and rejoicing.

Adieu, adieu, my dear Friend,

Yours, J. H.

P. S. Our Ambassador shewed me in the magazine what gave me great concern; such a hasty measure I hope will be stopped; for alas! our best performances have such a mixture of folly and sin, that praise is vanity and presumption, and pain to a thinking mind.

A

TRIP TO HOLYHEAD

IN A

MAIL COACH,

WITH A

CHURCHMAN AND A DISSENTER,

IN THE YEAR MDCCXCIII.

Ex collisione oppositorum coruscat veritas.

ADVERTISEMENT.

THE reader is informed, that the familiar conversation which passed in the course of this journey, and which is related by one of the company, in this series of letters, to his friend; was upon the following topics—The Toleration Act, passed 1689—The Enlargement of that Act, 1779—The American War—The Question of a Reform—The late Applications for a Repeal of the Corporation and Test-Laws—The French Revolution.

April 2*d*, 1793.

A

TRIP TO HOLYHEAD.

LETTER I.

Holyhead.

DEAR JACK,

WE got here last night well. How long we may be detained for a fair wind is uncertain. My time is employed in walking about, and some part of it in recollecting a curious conversation that passed among us in our way hither. It was, I acknowledge, of a kind quite new to me, and will, I fancy, be amusing to you. I shall give you but a part of it in this first letter. You may perhaps hear further from me hereafter on the same subject.

'Our company consisted of a lady, two gentlemen, and your humble servant. We had not got far from town before one of the gentlemen broke silence, and with a great deal of good humour and vivacity said,—We are to spend two or three days together in this little room, and I make no doubt, from the good nature I see in each countenance, that we are all disposed to contribute our utmost to the tranquillity and cheerfulness of this long journey. Now I have made it my observation, accustomed as I am to travel in mail coaches, that it is generally a good while before the company, how well soever disposed, are perfectly free and happy. A dead silence usually prevails, till they have all framed a guess of each other's characters and professions in life. I should think, therefore, if we were instantly to throw out our ideas of one another, with that ease and freedom which I am sure may be expected from the pleasant appearance of every one here, we could scarce fail of being amused, and of falling upon some subject of discourse that would be instructive and entertaining to us all. I hope I shall not be misunderstood. I mean no other disclosure of our professions in life than may introduce us to habits of free intercourse,

and to the discussion of subjects religious, political, or commercial, from which, however differently we may possibly think, light may be struck without any undue heat.

Sir, said a gentleman that sat in the opposite corner, I perfectly understand you, and, for my own part, have no objection to the proposal. But what do you mean by profession?—our religious, or civil profession? Oh! replied the other, both, or either, just as you please. Well! but which said the answerer, is to be guessed at first? Faith! replied the gentleman who proposed the scheme, I do not care which. The company, however, all agreed that we should begin with religion. Why then, said the gentleman in the corner, as you have made the proposal, I think you, my good Sir, should begin. With all my heart, replied he, and, if you please, begin with you, Sir, who I take to be a Dissenter.

You have rightly guessed, answered the other. But give me leave to ask, What was your reason for supposing me a Dissenter? Why, said he, there is a *Je ne sai quoi*, a certain something in your countenance, excuse me if I call it primness, which I have often noticed in those of your profession. And then, Sir, I observe your dress is plain and grave, from whence I conclude you are a clergyman of that order. And now having taken this freedom with you, you are at liberty, Sir, to take the same with me, and to tell the company what you take to be my religious profession.

Why, then, replied the Dissenter, I take you, Sir, to be a Churchman. Yes, Sir, said he, I am: and give me leave in return to ask, What are your reasons for this opinion? Why truly, said the Dissenter, beside the consideration, that the majority being of your profession the chance is greatly in favour of my guess; besides this, your free mode of speaking, not very usual among the prim Dissenters (Faith! I do not care which), induces me to suppose that you are no Nonconformist.

No, I am not, said our good-natured Churchman, and I wish, my good Sir, you were not. For, to tell you the truth, I have had, especially of late, great prejudices against that description of people. But I do not mean any reflection on you. For however mistaken, and on some accounts dangerous members of society, the generality of them may be, I do really augur other-

wise of you. Your appearance, Sir, is grave; yet with that gravity I observe a mixture of frankness and good-nature.

But now we are got upon the subject, added the Churchman, will you oblige me, Sir, all censure apart, with some account of the principles of that body of people, for I may possibly be mistaken in my opinion of them, and I have no doubt there are some worthy men among them.

A Dissenter, he replied, in the proper acceptation of the term, is one who conforms not to the rites of the Church of England, whether he be a Papist, Quaker, Presbyterian, Independent, or Baptist. But, in the sense it is commonly used, it means those of the three last descriptions. And the Toleration Act, at the revolution, had them chiefly in its eye, as had also that further Act passed in their favour in the year 1779.

But pray, Sir, said the Churchman, now you speak of the Toleration Act, will you do me the favour of explaining it, for indeed I have but an imperfect idea of it?

You must know, Sir, answered the Dissenter, at the eve of the revolution in 1688, both the church and the state were in imminent danger. Popery, with all its tremendous consequences, was coming in upon us like a flood. The bishops felt the danger, and sensible that the Dissenters had not been treated as they ought to have been, and that their concurrence was necessary to secure the church from falling again into the hands of the man at Rome, they made friendly overtures to them, and assured them of their ardent wish, when this cloud should be dispersed, that they, the Dissenters, might be put on a footing that should be perfectly easy and happy to them. The Dissenters readily concurred in the scheme of the revolution. King William, of glorious memory, came in. And one of the first things he wished to have settled, was, the providing for their security and prosperity, sensible that they were his most hearty friends, as they were known to be the friends of the constitution and liberty. But the most that could then be done for them was, the passing what is called the *Toleration Act*, which you wish me to explain to you.

Now you must understand, that many oppressive and cruel laws were passed against the Dissenters during the reign of

Charles II. These, it was natural to expect would, at the revolution, have been instantly repealed. But they were suffered to remain in the Statute Book; and, instead of the repeal of them, the Toleration Act came into the aid of the Dissenters, by exempting them from a liableness to those Statutes, upon condition of their taking the oaths of allegiance and supremacy, making and subscribing the Declaration against Popery, and subscribing the doctrinal Articles of the church. So that doing this, though they object to the constitution, discipline, and ceremonies of the Church of England, they are put into a state of protection, and are permitted to worship God in such a manner as they judge most agreeable to his word.

Well! Sir, observed the Churchman, from this account of the Toleration Act, I find that you do not dissent from the doctrine, but only from the rites and ceremonies of the church, and therefore are in the main with the church.

True, answered the Dissenter, that was the case at the time when this Act was passed. There was few then, if any among the Dissenters, who could not qualify under this Act. But the matter is now somewhat changed.

But before we go into that question, said the Churchman, give me leave to ask, what are the grounds of your dissent from the Articles which respect rites and ceremonies? For it is, I perceive, your difference in opinion with us here, that is the principal cause of your separation from the church.

To enter particularly, said the Dissenter, into the reasonings upon this subject, would be too long and tedious a business for this company. I will, however, at your wish, Sir, give you a general view of the matter in debate. We object to some of the ceremonies of the church, as not only having no authority from Scripture, but as being of pernicious tendency. We object to others, because, though in themselves innocent, yet they are made necessary. We object to many things in the Liturgy, and to the discipline and government of the church, as not agreeing, in our opinion, with the rule laid down in the New Testament, and the practice of primitive times. But more than this, we have our objections to the fundamental principle on which the hierarchy stands. Your

church, Sir, claims "a power" to which we think it not competent—"of decreeing rites or ceremonies," and affirms that "it hath authority in controversies of faith." It is, excuse me, a parliamentary church. In short, being established by the law of the land, and endowed by the state, we are at a loss to conceive how it can agree with our Saviour's account of it, who tells us that "his kingdom, or church, is not of this world." Nor can we reconcile its constitution with the account you give of it in your own Articles. For if the church of Christ be as you say, "a congregation of faithful men," and so collected out of the world, how can every individual in a parish be a member of it, yea, even Jews and infidels, for these are liable to excommunication, and therefore must, in your opinion, be of the church?

Why, Sir, said the Churchman, according to your account of our church, it must be antichristian, and you can be no other than hostile to it.

But I beg you, Sir, replied the Dissenter, to have patience. If you will allow me to proceed a moment in what I have to say on this matter, you will find me to be a very harmless enemy to your church, if indeed the term enemy, which I know not how to relish, is to be applied to me at all. In the first place then, you will believe me when I say, that there are many individuals among the governors of the church, the clergy, and the laity, whom I greatly esteem, and account most sincere and exemplary Christians. Many of the forms used in the church I highly approve of, and no doubt multitudes in the communion of it will be finally saved. And though I do not understand the business of an alliance between church and state, or that this idea has any foundation in the New Testament, yet I revere the civil constitution of my country, and will be obedient to its laws in every instance that does not affect my conscience, and the duty I owe God and my neighbour.

Yea, Sir, I admit that if the majority in any state are disposed to establish a particular form of religion, I ought not by any act of violence, to oppose them, or to behave myself with any the least appearance of rudeness or indecency towards them. "Thou shalt not revile the gods (the rulers) of thy people." And I will add, as most countries have adopted some form of

religion, and it is the idea of by far the greater part of the people of this country, that a certain form should be established here, I know of none, upon the whole, more favourable to the civil interests of men than ours. I had much rather that Episcopacy, managed with that moderation which has prevailed for near a century past, should be the establishment, than the forms of the Presbyterians, Independents, or Baptists. Indeed, on the principle I have laid down, which is common to the generality of the English Dissenters, neither of these can be established. And what better security can a people give to the state for their peaceable disposition, than the public avowal of principles, by which they preclude themselves from a possibility of being uppermost?

Indeed, Sir, said the Churchman, your reasoning strikes me as having force in it, and the mildness of your disposition not a little pleases me. I will not be hasty; but I was going to say, you have almost persuaded me to be a Dissenter.

Well! Sir, replied the Dissenter, I can only say, as St. Paul did to king Agrippa, 'I would to God you were not only almost, but altogether such as I am, except'—shall I say, 'these bonds?' No. The disabilities and restraints that I lie under, however unjust and unreasonable, are not to be mentioned the same time with what the apostle suffered, and what an infinite number of my pious ancestors endured.

But we will pause here. We are just got to our inn, where I hope we shall meet a good dinner, and that none of the company will have any objection to sit down at the same table with a Nonconformist. You will find, my good Sir, though you thought me somewhat prim, that I can be as cheerful as any of you, and though a Dissenter, that I shall put forward after dinner our good king's health with as much zeal as any of you Churchmen. They were all pleased; assured him they were happy in having fallen into his company, and that they had only one request to make, which was, that the same subject might be resumed in the afternoon.

Thus you have, Jack, our morning's conversation, and by another post you may perhaps have our afternoon's.

I am

Yours, &c.

LETTER II.

SIR,

HAVING dined, drank the king's health, paid our reckoning, and entered our carriage, the subject of the morning's conversation was resumed.

You gave us an account, Sir, said the Churchman, in the morning, of the Toleration Act passed at the Revolution in 1689, and, if I mistake not, intimated that there was another Act passed in favour of the Dissenters in the year 1779. Will you be so good as oblige us with an account of this last, and of the history of it?

This last Act, replied the Dissenter, did not repeal the former, so that those ministers who choose to qualify under it are still at liberty so to do. But this provides, that all such ministers as make a declaration of their belief of the holy Scriptures, instead of subscribing the Articles, shall, taking the oaths of allegiance, &c. be entitled to all the exemptions and advantages of the former Act.

So then, Sir, returned the Churchman, this is a provision for those who object to the doctrinal, as well as the other, Articles of the Church of England.

It is, said the Dissenter. And if you will allow me to state the fact to you respecting the Dissenting ministers, in the year 1772, the time when their first application to Parliament was made, you will understand the grounds and reasons of it.

The greater part of them (that is, of the three denominations taken together) approved of the Articles, and qualified as the law directs. But very many of them could not conscientiously subscribe. Some, because they did not believe them. They therefore lay open to the penal laws. Some approved of them in general, but had their objections to certain terms in them of doubtful meaning. They therefore were in the same predicament. Some, and not a few objected, that though they were true, yet being of human composition, they could not think it right to subscribe them: they would subscribe to the Scriptures, but not to words framed by fallible men. They therefore were alike exposed to the penal laws. And again, others objected to

making any confession of faith at the requisition of the civil magistrate.

Now, Sir, no man of a liberal mind will say, that persons of either of these descriptions, if peaceable and loyal subjects, be they Calvinists, Arminians, Arians, or Socinians; or be their reasoning on the question of subscription itself mistaken or otherwise, are deserving of the vengeance of the penal laws.

True, said the Churchman, but give me leave to ask, How can it be a matter of conscience with any man, who is free to subscribe to the belief of the holy Scriptures, to withhold subscription to what he believes to be the sense of Scripture?

Why truly, Sir, answered the Dissenter, I must acknowledge with you that I do not see the force of such reasoning. It would be no question of conscience with me, whether I should, *on a proper occasion*, subscribe to a declaration drawn by others, provided it met the idea and sense of my own mind. Admitting, however, that there are persons who have such difficulty, ought they, though willing to say they believe the Scriptures, to be denied the protection of the laws? Surely not.

But the question which most merited attention was, How far a man is obliged to give an account of his faith to him who has no right to demand it, and who demands it at the peril of depriving him, if he refuse, of his natural and civil rights? Here, Sir, I am at no loss to say, he is not obliged, or, in other words, that he is guilty of no sin in refusing to subscribe. Yea, I will add, if it could be proved that his subscribing were a positive acknowledgment of the rectitude of such imposing power, I should think it were his duty to refuse, because the doing it would be affirming what he believed to be an untruth. But this in my opinion is not the case. Had Nero told St. Paul that provided he acknowledged himself a Christian, no one should do him any harm, but he should have full liberty to preach the gospel where he pleased, I cannot believe St. Paul would have hesitated a moment upon the matter, whether he might conscientiously make a confession of his faith. No; he would have said, I am a Christian. The latter would have contracted no guilt by subscribing, though the former would have gone beyond his line in demanding subscription.

But, indeed, if it be the will of the majority in any country,

that a particular mode of religion should be established, and it be their wish that the minority who dissent should be protected from the evils to which their dissent might expose them; an acknowledgment of their dissent (which is, in other words, a profession of their faith) becomes necessary in order to their claiming that protection which the laws grant them. If a Dissenting minister prosecutes those who disturb him in the discharge of his duty, he must say that he is a Dissenting minister, in order to avail himself of the law made in his favour. If he will not, how can he be protected? Thus, Sir, you have a general view of the state of the Dissenters at this time, and of their various reasonings on these matters.

This being the case, said the Churchman, I should suppose the difficulty must have been considerable, to procure such unanimity among yourselves, as would be necessary to engage the attention of legislature.

It was, replied the Dissenter, but however, by prudent management, the difficulty was surmounted.

Some good men among the Calvinists, who lamented the growth of error, and suspected that this application to parliament originated in an aversion to the doctrine contained in the thirty-nine Articles, felt great pain, and thought they had a loud call in providence to oppose this measure. "What are we, said they, to go to parliament, and hold a language that implies indifference to our own religious principles? We are not weary of what we take to be the true gospel, and in defence of which our pious forefathers ventured their lives. We want no relief. Besides, where is the wisdom of our officiously coming forward, to remove out of the way of Socinians and Arians certain obstructions to the propagation of their dangerous errors, which others are to be accountable for, not we?" This sort of reasoning had a considerable effect with many persons of honest minds but of little discernment.

The principal people, however, among the Dissenting Calvinists, and by far the greater part of them, opposed this reasoning with no small effect. They nobly said, "We do not merely consider ourselves at liberty to join in this application to parliament, but think the regard we owe to our religious principles obliges us to give it all the support we possibly can.

God forbid it should ever be thought, that we had our doubts that truth is incompetent to its own support, or that what we understand to be the gospel, wants the aid of the wealth of this world to add splendour to it, or of the powers of this world to crush its opposers. As we wish to enter the field ourselves unmanacled, we wish also the adversary may. We will meet him, not with carnal, but spiritual weapons; with sound reasoning, and not contemptuous language; with the word of God, and the armour of righteousness, and not with fines and imprisonment. *The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*, and truth must make its way to the heart by other means than human laws. It is an insult to Christ, to plant by way of defence about the impregnable fortress of his church, the puny batteries of penal laws. Such an illegitimate mode of protecting and supporting his kingdom, is the most invidious method the enemy of mankind could contrive to weaken and destroy it. And were a man of the most erroneous principles in religion to publish his doctrine to the multitude from the iron bars of a prison, he would be more likely to get proselytes, than if he were allowed to harangue them in the open air, without any apprehension for the safety of his person or property." This reasoning prevailed, and by much the greater part, as I said, of the Calvinistic Dissenters, cordially joined in the application.

Those who could not subscribe at the requisition of the civil magistrate, whatever their doctrinal sentiments might be, were not to be persuaded to join in the application. But their number, compared with the rest, was inconsiderable. They said, "Pray for an entire repeal of the penal laws, and do not submit to the substitution of one test in the room of another." But those gentlemen did not allow themselves sufficiently to reflect on the great improbability, if not impossibility, of gaining that point at that time, considering the aspect which those laws bear to the Roman Catholics as well as the Protestant Dissenters. Willing, however, that their brethren might be put into a state of legal security, which it was hard to say how they themselves possibly could, they did not oppose the application, although they joined not in it.

As to the remainder, who objected to human formulas, but

were willing to subscribe to the belief of the Scriptures, their number was not small, and they were most hearty friends to the application.

Thus the great difficulty respecting the general concurrence of the Dissenters in this business was got over. And, among so numerous a body of people through the kingdom, it was not to be wondered at that here and there some should be dissatisfied.

I think, Sir, said the Churchman, I clearly understand the grounds and reasons of your application to parliament, and how matters stood with you as a body at this time. But will you be so good as to give us the history of the application itself, the manner in which it was conducted, and by what means it succeeded?

Some ministers, replied the Dissenter, who had thoroughly considered the matter, conferred together upon it, and were of opinion, that this was the proper time for applying. But, previous to the calling the general body together, two or three of them who had the distribution of the royal bounty to poor Dissenting ministers, and their widows and children, and were in habits of intimacy with some of the leading people in power, thought it their duty to state this business to them, and to assure them that by taking it up and forwarding it, they would be doing a thing manifesly right in itself, and which would greatly oblige the Dissenters. Lord North, struck with the rectitude of the measure, candidly signified his willingness to accede to it. And Dr. Drummond, then archbishop of York, was, upon this the first mention of it, alike favourably disposed to it.

The ministers were allowed to inform their brethren of the good disposition of government; and they, persuaded that this communication would have a considerable influence to procure unanimity, immediately summoned the general body. The effect was such as they expected. For those, who it was natural to suppose would be cool, if not utterly averse to the business for the reasons before mentioned, were scarce likely to object, when they found there was such a manifest opening before them. A committee was appointed to treat with our friends above, which committee had quickly the pleasure of being fully

satisfied, that the information they had received was well founded.

But, Sir, not two or three weeks passed before lord North and the archbishop had difficulties thrown in their way, which at first did not occur to their minds. They still clearly saw the rectitude of the abstract question respecting religious liberty, that no man ought to be persecuted for his religious opinions; but they were shook upon the policy of the measure, whether it were consistent with the safety of the church to enlarge the Toleration Act, and so to allow of a dissent from its doctrines, as well as its rites and ceremonies. "This would be an innovation. If they said A, they must say B, and so on to the end of the alphabet. The petitioning clergy were eager to have the Articles revised, and the granting the Dissenters their request, would give encouragement to the others who were manifestly for throwing all into confusion. Besides, if every man upon declaring his belief of the Scriptures might be allowed to set up as a preacher, a wide door would be opened to enthusiasm and fanaticism."

Such were the main objections to the policy of the bill. Upon which I shall only observe here, that sound morality is, after all, the best policy. Is it, or is it not right to persecute men for their religious principles? Or, in other words, to forbid them to propagate what they take to be the sense of Scripture? for such liberty and no more was the object of the bill. The telling them, "You are not in a state of persecution, the penal laws are not carried into execution, nor have you any reason to apprehend they will"—All this was to little purpose; for what man who knows himself to be a peaceable and good subject, can like to be in a state of connivance instead of legal security?

So the matter stood when the bill was brought into the House of Commons—Lord North not having it in his power, as matters were circumstanced, to give it positive support, and yet, after what had passed, feeling himself no way disposed to oppose it. Many able speeches were delivered in favour of religious liberty, and after a very particular investigation of the subject, the bill passed the Commons by a great majority. Its fate was different in the House of Lords, where, however, it

was not without a support, which did no small honour to the abilities and principles of many noble Peers.

The disappointment was felt by the Dissenters. They took care, however, to guard against intemperate warmth, which indeed would have ill become their character as ministers of religion, and which they were sensible would, if indulged, operate powerfully to obstruct the success of a future application. For they by no means gave up the point, satisfied their cause was founded in truth and policy.

Many pamphlets were published on the occasion, and light hereby diffused over a subject that had been little thought of. The committe took great pains, by frequent visits to the lords spiritual and temporal, and to the members of the lower House, to investigate thoroughly the merits of the question, and to obviate objections urged respecting the influence which the passing this bill might have upon the safety and tranquillity of the church. They said they had no connection with the petitioning clergy; that they presumed not to dictate respecting any alterations in the constitution of the church, its discipline or articles; that it ill became them to give an opinion on the terms of admission into it; and that whether the door were narrow or wide, all they had to ask was, that there might be sufficient room without, and that they might enjoy all that religious liberty, to which as good subjects they conceived they had a right, and which would not endanger the peace either of the church or state.

These reasonings met with a patient and favourable attention, produced the desired effect, and in the year 1779 the bill past both Houses, and received the royal assent.

But I am afraid, said the Dissenter, that you are tired with this long tale. We will dismiss the subject, for we are just got to our inn.

Sir, said the Churchman, we are obliged to you for the information you have given us, and as you gave us the king's health at noon, we will certainly drink yours at night, and that of all such moderate and candid Dissenters as yourself. But I shall wish much to know to-morrow, with the leave of the company, how you come now to be upon such ill terms with government, and with the people of this country in general.

Thus, my friend, I have given you our afternoon's conversation. And before long you may perhaps have what followed the next day.

I am

Yours, &c.

LETTER III.

My dear Friend,

You see I am as good as my word. Having at our setting off, the second day of our journey, had some talk about our entertainment the past night, the weather, country, roads, and our next stage, we naturally fell upon the subject of the present political state of the Dissenters; a topic which all the company seemed more deeply interested in, than what had hitherto engaged our conversation.

Having gained your point, said the Churchman, in the year 1779, and feeling yourselves now in a state of legal security, I should suppose you must have been content and happy. We were, said the Dissenter. Pray how is it then, replied the Churchman, that you are now considered in so unfavourable a point of light, both by government and the people in general? For you cannot be insensible of the fact, that you are understood to be hostile to the measures of administration, and, forgive me if I add, the disturbers of the public peace.

This question, replied the Dissenter, will require very particular discussion; nor am I unwilling to enter into it. But, in the mean time, you will give me leave to state to you a few plain facts of material consequence in this debate. Which done, you shall be at full liberty, Sir, to bring forward your objections to our political character and conduct. And as you will not wonder that I should vindicate the Dissenters to the utmost of my power from the aspersions cast on them, so you may be sure I will not justify them in what I take to be amiss.

In the first place then, he proceeded, it is a fact that the Dissenters are, and ever must be, if they act consistently with their

principles and interest, Whigs. They are hearty friends of the constitution, that is, of limited monarchy, or that form of government by King, Lords, and Commons which has long obtained in this country. How it may be now with a few young people among them, of little property, less knowledge, and still less modesty, I will not pretend to say. But I am sure, a very little time ago, a republican among the Dissenters, would have been stared at as a wonderful phenomenon. To the principles also of the revolution in 1688, the Dissenters are well known to be warmly attached, for that is the glorious era whence they date their liberties. By that event they consider the constitution as confirmed, and proved to possess those principles which are essential to its perpetuity and improvement. None rejoiced more than they did upon that occasion; and king William, our glorious deliverer, ever looked upon them as his natural and most cordial friends.

The settling the succession in the present family, was a measure that afforded them the highest pleasure. And as at the close of queen Anne's reign they trembled when the Schism Bill, that cruel engine of Tory production, was just taking effect, so their joy was unbounded at the coming in of good king George. Their attachment to his family is too well known to need proof. The late duke of Newcastle, whose zeal for the Brunswick line none ever doubted, and to whom his present Majesty, in a conversation with him at the close of his life, acknowledged himself and his family more indebted than to any man for his exertions in the year 1715; I say, that good old Whig was their firm friend. They distinguished themselves by their loyalty in the two rebellions of 1715 and 1745; and there are those among them now living, who, at their own expence, and at the hazard of their lives, bore arms in defence of the crown. They may then expect to be believed when they say, as they have done on many occasions, and lately in the most explicit and public manner, that they are the firm friends of the Hanover succession as by law established. You are satisfied therefore, Sir, they are Whigs, nor is it easy to conceive how they should be otherwise so long as they are Dissenters, and hold their religious liberties on the grounds of an Act of Toleration.

There is another fact I wish to establish, before we proceed to inquire how far they are culpable in the eye of government and the public—and that is, that the Dissenters, take them as a body, have not been accustomed to meddle with politics. The generality of them through the kingdom are plain pious people, whose minds are more occupied with the concerns of another world than this. So they may but provide for their families, be on good terms with their neighbours, and have no alarming apprehensions of being deprived of their religious liberties, they do not trouble their heads about what is doing above, who is in or who is out. When indeed public calamities are impending, they inquire after news, and have an opinion to give on the measures of government as well as others.

And though I am far from thinking any one is to be precluded from the right of judging for himself in questions of a political nature, and am persuaded that it would be a great folly to attempt to obstruct the diffusion of this kind of knowledge at a time when almost every man throughout Europe considers the trading in this commodity as his birth-right, yet the good old Puritans, whose descendants the Dissenters are, were used to think serious religion on the decline, when good people, without any call of Providence, went with eagerness into speculations of this kind; and I am well satisfied, that in those congregations of the Dissenters through England and Wales, where genuine piety most flourishes, there is the least talk about politics. In cities and large trading towns, Dissenters of opulence, and in a genteel line of life, are indeed under a temptation to mingle more with the world than their country brethren; and how much they have suffered by it in their most important interests it is not to my present purpose to say. Only I must insist, for that is the present point to be established, that the generality of the Dissenters are not of this description.

And as to their ministers, Sir, they have more important matters to attend to than questions of policy and jurisprudence, which fall to the department of the court and the senate. Nor do I think, were you to inquire through the kingdom, you would find many of them ambitious to be accounted statesmen. If here and there such a one is to be met with, you will find

little of that puritanical savour in his public religious exercises, which much prevailed among the Dissenters fifty or sixty years ago, and which I hope is not even yet wholly departed.

You will tell me, indeed, of a Dr. Price and a Dr. Priestley, men who have been much talked of, and who, in my opinion, have done a great deal of good and a great deal of harm. I do all honour to their characters as scientific men, and men of distinguished integrity and virtue. By their calculations and experiments the world has been greatly benefited, and their reasonings on civil and religious liberty have met the approbation of not a few wise and good men of all parties. But, Sir, considered as Dissenting ministers, they evidently went beyond their line. And, popular as they may have been among political and philosophical Christians, I assure you they are far from being popular among the general run of the Dissenters. You greatly mistake the matter, if you suppose them to be the representatives of the general body of the Dissenters, or trustees for either their politics or divinity.

And now, Sir, these two points settled, that the Dissenters are staunch Whigs, and that taking them as a body they are not noisy politicians, but a serious peaceable people, what you may have to lay to their charge cannot materially affect them.

Why, Sir, said the Churchman, you are generally considered as having had a principal concern in bringing on the American war. You were thought to be, of all people, the most eager in crying out for a reform both in church and state, in representation and executive government. The untimely, rude, and clamorous manner in which you brought forward your petition for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts, shewed you to be hostile to administration. And the ecstatic pleasure you expressed at the French Revolution, and at every stage of its progress, marks your character as veering to republicanism, and as a people therefore who ought to be very carefully watched and guarded against.

The Dissenter replied, as to the American war, which issued in a separation of the colonies from the mother country, and brought after it a prodigious debt, which is still an occasion of complaint and uneasiness among us, it was an event greatly to be lamented. But if the cause of it be inquired into, it will be

found to have originated in a concurrence of circumstances, few of which can with justice be imputed to the Dissenters. The truth is, the dismission at the beginning of the present reign of a Whig ministry, whose zeal for the royal family had been long tried and approved, was an occasion of general uneasiness. A change of principles, it was said, had taken place, and that idea was industriously, and perhaps malevolently circulated. It fled to the colonies, and the people there were taught to look with a jealous eye upon the measures of government.

And now, that cordiality and confidence which had long prevailed between them and us, began to decline. Nor were there men wanting who, themselves deceived by false reports, or insidiously meaning to impose on others, were in a temper to blow the sparks of dissatisfaction and suspicion into a flame. There was as yet no rupture, nor perhaps did a man among them dream of a separation. The governors, however, particularly of the northern provinces, sent home alarming accounts of the disposition of the people to revolt. The Americans, informed from hence of the ill offices their governors had rendered them, were irritated to the last degree. So that every measure adopted both to quiet and restrain them, was considered as meant either to lull them asleep, or to ensnare them.

They were, however, still on both sides reluctant to a separation, insomuch that neither party could persuade itself, that the opposite meant to push things to extremities. This is well known to have been a fact as to the Americans. And I shall not easily forget what a great man said to me but a little before the war broke out:—"Sir, you may depend upon it there will be no blood spilt in America." The event, however, proved otherwise. After many struggles, the genuine effect of filial affection, full credit was at length unhappily given to the report, that chains were forging for them by a Tory and despotic ministry. So they began to form, unite, and prepare for resistance. And what followed you need not be told.

Now, Sir, in many of these causes of the American war, the Dissenters could have no influence. But you will say, the northern colonists, because descendants of ancestors driven from this country by the furious zeal of archbishop Laud, must to be sure be Dissenters; and therefore no doubt had communication

with their brethren here, who urged them on to this business. But this, Sir, ought to be well proved before it is asserted. There are documents now existing, and I will add, in my own hands, which go directly to prove in the most unequivocal manner, that the leading people in the Massachuset government, did not, at the eve of the war, aim at a separation, much less at independence; and that they most heartily wished to be on good terms with us, and to be considered what they insisted they were, loyal subjects. And you need not be told that the Virginian and southern colonies, which were by no means of the Dissenting cast, were as violent in their opposition to this country as those we have been speaking of.

If there were any among the Dissenters here, who, in the early stage of this unhappy quarrel, carried their speculations to such a length as to persuade themselves that it was seriously the intention of government to subjugate the Americans, and that it was therefore their duty to warn them of their danger, I think they speculated untruly, and are therefore to be blamed. It was by no means the interest of government to carry matters to the length which these people supposed. For whatever might be the principles of those in power, they must have been very shallow politicians indeed, if they could conceive it possible, considering the temper of the times, that they should succeed in an attempt to enslave the colonies, with a view to rivet the chains upon us at home. Such an Utopian scheme could scarce enter into the heads of any men. And I know it to be a fact, that the bishops, how much soever they wished episcopacy to be admitted into America, (and under due restraints I see no reason why it might not) were exceeding moderate in the measures they took to that end, and cautioned their friends in that country to be careful that they did not irritate their Dissenting brethren, or give them the least occasion to apprehend that they meant to infringe upon their religious liberties.

A few visionary people, who had filled their heads with horrible ideas of the despotic intentions of government, might go into that country, and officiously cense the people wherever they came with their political opium, and so do, I will not say intentionally but really, a great deal of harm. Such men, if they are to be brought to their senses, must feel themselves unhap-

py. But the blame of this is not to be laid to the body of Dissenters. Among all bodies of people there will be some wrong-headed folks, who at every change of the moon, every new appearance in the world and the church, run stark mad with politics and divinity.

But the war, as I said, took effect through the unhappy concurrence of a vast variety of causes, and some of them, to appearance, of very opposite natures. Not this and that person only, or this and that description of men only, are to be blamed. Both the colonies and the mother country are to be blamed: they for being too credulous of every idle report brought to them, and we for being too hasty in our measures with them. The American governors were to blame. Administration was to blame. Parliament was to blame. The people of this country in general were to blame.

Well but, Sir, said the Churchman, Dr. Price took a part in this business, which always struck me as having a tendency to inflame. His book to prove the injustice and impolicy of the war, was written with no small acrimony; and his zeal, supported as it was with a phalanx of disaffected people, must have had an effect to push things to extremities.

But, Sir, replied the Dissenter, supposing him and his connections to be ever so blame-worthy, why are the Dissenters to be reproached? He did not write by their direction or authority, nor was his book, when written, taken up and recommended by any body of people among them. And it should be remembered, though I am not fond of recrimination, that some who have since that time poured the most severe reflections on Dr. Price, as a friend of anarchy and the most licentious principles, were themselves full as violent as ever he could possibly be in their opposition to the American war. And if the Dissenters must at all events be charged with having contributed to the failure of this unfortunate war, by their unreasonable and warm opposition to it, they have at least the consolation to reflect, that the father of the present minister, Mr. Burke, and many other friends of their king and country, were sharers with them in the blame. But, Sir, the complexion of the Dissenters is not to be taken from the political writings of Dr. Price, any more than from those of Mr. Israel Mauduit, who wrote as pointedly

on the other side of the question; and with with whom not a few of them were in unison as to political matters.

But give me leave to observe, before we quit this subject, that the vast variety of circumstances which contributed to the loss of the colonies, operated, as is the case in all events, especially those of such magnitude, under the direction and control of divine Providence; and this calamity, taken in the whole round of it, was meant, no doubt, to chastise both their and our national ingratitude, and other crying vices. It will be well if we learn from it the importance of moderation in our reasoning about public matters, and of guarding against that undue warmth which has often thrown the happiest and most prosperous people into confusion. This advice is the more reasonable, as in the short account given of the origination of the American war, we have seen circumstances of trifling account in the beginning, prove in the end to have been big with consequences the most calamitous.

Nor can we reflect on the part which the French cabinet took in this business, and consider the miserable state to which it is now reduced, without being struck with the vicissitude of human affairs, and feeling ourselves obliged to acknowledge, *Verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.* It requires a more than ordinary stretch of charity to believe, that their interference in favour of the Americans was the pure effect of disinterested concern for the rights of mankind. The world set it down to the account of animosity to this country. And if the question were thoroughly inquired into, it would perhaps be found, that it was a measure adopted through the counsels of those, who hoped it would in its consequences operate to bring about a change of a like nature in France.

Be that as it may, the two characters which then drew the attention of the public, as the generous assertors of the injured cause of liberty, are now cast into a horrible shade. The French general, who had commanded the forces of the revolting Americans, we see, through the desertion of his com-patriots at home, precipitated into a prison; and the unhappy monarch, whose statue amidst the shouts of the new American republic, had taken place of that of the British king, perishing by the hands of his own subjects on a scaffold. These are a

kind of phenomena in the history of human kind, which, to overlook, would argue the greatest folly: and in which not to observe the hand of divine Providence, would require the levity, irreligion, and infidelity of the unhappy French.

But it is time to pause, and to dismiss for the present a subject that will cast a gloom upon our minds, and spoil our relish for our dinner. For we are just got to —— where our coachman tells us he can allow us an hour and no more.

Thus, Jack, you have our second morning's conversation. The subject was resumed in the afternoon; and if you like politics, you may perhaps, before 'tis long, hear again from

Yours, &c.

LETTER IV.

Dear Sir,

In the afternoon, as was intimated in my last, our subject was resumed.

Well, Sir, said the Dissenter, I hope your prejudices against us on account of the American war are removed, and that you do not lay the blame of that business at our door. I do not, said the Churchman. But there are other charges lying against you, which I fancy you will not find it so easy to get rid of. Who have been more busy than you Dissenters, to put forward this noisy talk of a reform, and so to throw a peaceable and happy people into confusion?

Sir, said the Dissenter, there is no government on earth but has its imperfections and mistakes, and of consequence there is no government but needs a reform. You do not do well, therefore, to scout the very word as if it were a bad one, and to tremble at the idea of it as if you saw a spectre. There was never any period in the history of this country when a reform was not wanting, and he must know very little of the world indeed, who is not sensible that it is now really wanted, as well as loudly called for. But give me leave, Sir, before we agitate this question, which I hope we shall do with moderation and

good humour, to disabuse the Dissenters, as far as I am able, of the imputation of wantonly joining in the cry, with a malevolent view of throwing all into confusion.

Dissenters have a right to reason upon the state of their country as well as others; and if they do not feel for its welfare, they are certainly not good members of society. But the greater part of them, as I observed before, are chiefly busied about matters of far greater importance than politics. If, however, feeling in common with their fellow-subjects that weight of public taxes, which hath accumulated through various, and many of them I acknowledge unavoidable causes; if hearing abroad much talk upon the business of a reform; and if alarmed, as all the world have been of late, with convulsions of a very extraordinary kind through Europe; if I say, thus circumstanced, they express their wish that some lenient and effectual measures may be adopted to redress grievances, and quiet the minds of the public, they surely do not merit the character of disturbers of the peace of society: especially if they are careful to avoid those intemperate heats, and those indecencies of language as well as conduct, which tend not only to defeat the object, but in the long run to weaken and destroy a constitution, the best framed of any on earth to secure the rights and liberties of mankind.

But, Sir, said the Churchman, it is notorious that many Dissenters have fallen into those indiscretions (I might call them by a harsher name) which you protest against. Whether they have or not, replied the Dissenter, we will by and by enquire. In the mean time allow me to throw out a few general ideas upon the matter of a reform, as it respects parliament, the executive part of government, and the church.

As to a parliamentary reform, it is a question of great magnitude, and I pretend not to be competent to it. Its utility and importance have been announced by many in power, and it hath been much wished for abroad. Something therefore should be done. And common sense teaches that whatever scheme is adopted, it ought to be a practicable one. But I have never yet met with any scheme that appeared to me to be of this description. Those which go to the greatest extent, such as major Cartwright's and the duke of Richmond's, cannot in my

opinion be attempted, especially as things are now circumstanced, without endangering the existence of the constitution. And would a skilful physician advise a remedy which he was morally sure would destroy the patient? But, say the agents of France, that is the very thing that should be attempted. "Pull down your constitution. It may be easily done, and if you want assistance we will come and help you." But what sober man, what friend to his country, even though his principles were republican, can reconcile himself to the horrors of a civil war, and wish to see our rivers dyed with blood? Or who that is concerned for his own safety, would lend his hand to the pulling down a building, under the ruins of which he had every reason in the world to apprehend he should be buried. But the constitution, Sir, is in my apprehension a beautiful and venerable structure. It is its repair that is to be wished for, not its destruction. Even in its present state it is infinitely preferable to an imperious and tyrannical democracy.

Whatever measures, therefore, may tend to restore to its natural and proper vigour; to possess each of the three states of its due proportion of power, and to prevent their unnatural coalescence and absorption into each other; to guard every avenue to parliament against the approach of bribery and corruption, and the dignity of those who sit there from the disgraceful taint of venal influence, and, in fine, to secure to itself the reverence, confidence, and hearty good will of the public; whatever measures may be thought of that embrace these objects, although they may be gradual in their operation, every sincere friend to this country would be glad to see adopted. I have not the presumption to propose any, but really I think we should not too hastily suppose, that there is not wisdom enough in the senate to devise some such measures, or virtue enough to carry them into effect. Mr. Grenville's act for trying the merits of contested elections, has produced very salutary consequences, and why may we not hope, that other remedies may before long be applied to the remaining evils complained of?

As to the executive parts of government, there is certainly occasion for reform in the mode of administering justice, and of levying and applying the revenue. But be the evils in either of these departments what they may, they are not of such a

kind or magnitude as to justify the circulating complaints through the kingdom, that not only tend to disquiet the minds, but irritate the passions of the public, and so to provoke insurrection and rebellion.

With regard to the former, admitting that great inconveniencies do arise from the obscurity in which the common law is enveloped, and the difficulty of acquiring a comprehensive view of the statute-books which are grown to so immense a bulk; admitting that the progress of justice is much slower in this country than in some others, which by the way goes to prove that our constitution is at a remoter distance than theirs from despotism; admitting that the forms observed in our courts are intricate, expensive, and tedious, and that the chicanery of many practisers in the profession is become a very great grievance; admitting, I say, that all these complaints, and others that might be added, are not without foundation: yet surely we have considerations to oppose to these evils, which do infinitely more than balance them.

The mild spirit of our laws, which allows the accused all the assistance he can reasonably desire, and at the same time casts around the innocent an impenetrable shield; the security afforded to our persons, property, and reputation by the Habeas Corpus Act, the law for trial by juries, and that respecting libels, which has lately received such a parliamentary exposition as is manifestly favourable to the liberty of the press; the well known character of the judges, and the appointment of their salaries by legislature, whereby they are made independent of the crown: the advantages derived from these sources, too numerous to be particularly detailed, clearly show that we have comparatively speaking little to complain of on this head, but on the contrary much to boast of.

The king cannot send the meanest of his subjects to the Bastile by a Letter de Cachet, nor a peer oppress the most helpless peasant, without his having redress in our courts of justice. So that what one of the learned judges observed the other day, in a charge to the grand jury of Middlesex, is most certainly true, and deserving the attention of the public—that "there is no nation in the world that can boast of a more perfect system of government than that under which we have the

happiness to live, where no man is so high as to be above the reach of the law, and no man so low as not to be within its protection; where the power of the crown (on the one hand) and the liberty of the subject (on the other) are both effectually secured, and at the same time kept within their proper limits."

But the question respecting the revenue is generally thought the most interesting, and a matter that calls loudly for reform: and no doubt the debt lying on this nation is very large, and the expences of government great, and of consequence the taxes burdensome. But then it should be remembered, that about one half of these taxes go to the payment of the interest of this great debt, which hath been long accumulating, and which was prodigiously increased by the American war; from the blame of which, as we have seen, no party among us is to be wholly excused. It should also be remembered, that a great part of the expences of government are on all hands acknowledged to be necessary *a*, and that as a reform respecting the manage-

a The bishop of Landaff, in an Appendix to his Sermon preached in Charlotte-street chapel, April, 1785; says,—"It has been studiously inculcated into the minds of the multitude, that a monarchy, even a limited one, is a far more expensive mode of civil government than a republic; that a civil list of a million a year, is an enormous sum which might be saved to the nation. Supposing that every shilling of this sum could be saved, and that every shilling of it was expended in supporting the dignity of the crown—both which suppositions are entirely false—still should I think the liberty, the prosperity, the tranquillity, the happiness of this great nation cheaply purchased by such a sum; still should I think that he would be a madman in politics, who would, by a change in the constitution, risk these blessings (and France supplies us with a proof that infinite risk would be run) for a paltry saving of expence. I am not, nor have ever been, the patron of corruption. So far as the civil list has a tendency to corrupt the judgment of any member of either house of parliament, it has had a bad tendency which I wish it had not; but I cannot wish to see the splendour of the crown reduced to nothing, lest its proper weight in the scale of the constitution should be thereby destroyed. A great portion of this million is expended in paying the salaries of the judges, the interpreters of our law, the guardians of our lives and properties; another portion is expended in maintaining ambassadors at different courts, to protect the general concerns of the nation from foreign aggression; another portion is expended in pensions and donations to men of letters and ingenuity; to men who have by naval, military, or civil services, just claims to the attention of their country; to persons of respectable families and connexions, who have been humbled and broken down by misfortunes. I do not speak with accuracy, nor on such a subject is accuracy requisite; but I am not far wide of truth in saying, that a fifth

ment of the rest is certainly most desirable and important, so this object has not been wholly kept out of view. In this business men of ability have exerted themselves, and not without some success: and among them Mr. Burke by his labours has certainly merited a large share of the thanks of the public. It should further be remembered, that in the arrangement of the taxes attention is paid to the important question of equality, and that a very considerable weight falls upon the opulent from which the lower orders of people are wholly exempted.

It is also to be considered, that the trade and commerce of this kingdom have of late years rapidly increased, and of consequence new sources of employment for the poor have been opened, and the price of labour raised. The legal annual provision for the poor is, if I mistake not, nearly of the same amount with the land tax. And the charitable institutions of every kind which have risen into existence all through this country, within twenty or thirty years past, are too numerous to be recited, and fail not to excite the admiration of every foreigner that visits us.

And yet after all that has been said, I do not mean to insinuate that there are few if any evils to be reformed. Far from it. Men of avarice and dissipation are of fruitful invention, and too many of these among us, void of all sense of justice, and all feeling for their country, are ever upon the watch to enrich themselves at the expence of the public. Strict economy, therefore, and unrelaxing attention are necessary, to guard the revenue against the rapacious assaults of men of no principle and of broken fortunes.

But be the evils that call for redress what they may, no man who compares the state of this country with that of any other kingdom or state in Europe, will I think be at a loss one moment to determine, on what spot he may be most likely to enjoy security, liberty, and happiness in their greatest perfection. As to France and the Netherlands, it is not fair to bring them, in the present crisis, into comparative view. But if any one, clearly convicted of seditious practices in this country, were to

part of the million is more than sufficient to defray the expences of the royal household—What a mighty matter is it to complain of, that each individual contributes less than sixpence a year towards the support of the monarchy?"

be punished according to his demerit, I do not know a more adequate punishment he could receive than that of being banished to one of those states.

Reformation in the church is what now remains to be considered. But I must beg leave, Sir, to be silent here. I am a Dissenter, and it strikes me that it is scarce liberal for one who is not of the church to take upon him to say what ought to be reformed in it. Indeed when called upon to justify my dissent from the church of England, I am under the necessity of pointing out what I take to be amiss. But this I wish always to do with candour and moderation; and when debating the matter about the body of Moses, like Michael the archangel, I dare not bring against the adversary, be he who he may, a railing accusation.

Well but, said the Churchman, however candidly you have treated the question of reform in these three general branches of it, many of your brethren, I assure you, have treated it after a very different manner, or I am greatly misinformed.

I told you before, replied the Dissenter, that having given my own opinion upon the matter itself, and upon the manner in which all questions of this nature ought to be treated, you should be at full liberty, Sir, to point out what has been reprehensible in the conduct of any of my brethren. But I beg you will keep it in mind that the inadvertencies, or if you will indecent warmth, of some among us, is not to be set down to the account of the body of Dissenters.

Why then, Sir, returned the Churchman, we have heard much of your revolution sermons, and revolution dinners too, the former filled with politics, and the latter followed with toasts and speeches, which, as the story has gone abroad, were manifestly calculated to excite disaffection to government, if not to engender principles favourable to republicanism.

You have heard, rejoined the Dissenter, some truth and a great deal of falsehood. I will endeavour to separate the one from the other in the best manner I can, and I have my information from sources that may be depended on.

The Dissenters have been used for a long course of years to pay a particular attention to two memorable days in our calendar, the fifth of November, when by an extraordinary providence

the flower of the nation escaped instant destruction by the hands of Popish miscreants; and the fourth of November rendered as famous by the landing of the glorious king William, whom the same providence sent hither to deliver us from the chains of despotism, that had been already forged, and were then just ready to be rivetted on us.

The observation of these days, particularly by the Dissenters, and down to the present time, no one can wonder at who is acquainted with the history of this country, and is a friend of civil and religious liberty. Sir, the principles of the church of Rome are still the same, however the tempers of many in her communion are meliorated by time and experience. Nor have the Jesuits, those able and faithful supporters of antichristian craft and tyranny, abandoned their ethical system, though their institution is now under a cloud. Their dispersion has perhaps contributed to the propagation of their morals. And however many of them of late, to the surprise of all the world, have become advocates for liberty, it ought not to be forgotten that by their diabolical casuistry they have shaken kingdoms to the centre, and bathed millions of innocent and pious people in seas of blood. I speak with no acrimony against individuals, but at a time when the tendency of men's political principles is watched with so jealous an eye, surely those political principles which, blended with religion, go to the establishing the most horrid despotism over men's consciences, properties, and persons, ought not to be wholly overlooked. No apology, therefore, need be made for the observation of the *fifth* of November.

The *fourth*, for the very same reason, ought to be observed. For the day the Prince of Orange set his foot on the British shore, a constitution the fairest and most venerable in the whole world, but then nearly on the point of expiring, recovered from the swoon into which the emissaries of Rome had cast her, assumed a smiling countenance, and asserted a claim she ought to have, and ever will have, not only to secure her own existence from immediate assassination, but to improve and prolong her life. This doctrine may not be pleasant in the ears of some people, but it stands upon the sound principles of reason and equity, and was that by which alone the revolution of which we

are speaking in the year 1688, could have been effected. The Dissenters, though not benefited by the Prince of Orange's accession to the throne, in the manner and to the degree they had a right to expect, yet to this day think of him and the service he did this country, at the hazard of every thing that was dear to him, with rapture, and feel the most pleasing and grateful emotion at the sound of "the immortal memory of good king William."

Now thus circumstanced, can you wonder, Sir, that they should meet for public worship on the fourth and fifth of November, persuaded as they are that the hand of God was concerned in those events? None surely can with reason blame them for offering their unfeigned tribute of praise for these signal interpositions of Providence in favour of their country. And yet even these meetings do not take place by the appointment of the Dissenters as a body, nor are they universally observed in our congregations. But, Sir, allow me to ask, Is it fair to give the name of politics to a recital of the facts to be commemorated and acknowledged on these occasions? No man is a greater enemy to the bringing politics into the pulpit than myself, and I speak the sense of the Dissenters in general. It is a great evil, and reflects no small dishonour on the character of a Christian minister, whose mind when leading the worship of God, ought to be occupied with subjects of an infinitely more noble and sublime nature. But it is an evil which, you will excuse me if I say, hath prevailed less in our church than in yours.

It must be acknowledged indeed that Dr. Price, and some other ministers, did a few years ago introduce into their sermons on the fourth of November extraneous matter. Many Dissenters greatly regretted it, and I believe they themselves have since been sensible of the mistake, as ill-disposed persons took occasion from thence to insinuate that they meant, the revolution in France commencing at that time, to put forward something of the like nature here. But however earnestly these gentlemen wished for a reform in this country, I am well satisfied that a change in the constitution of it was an idea at the remotest distance from their minds. Nor yet do I mean wholly to excuse them. They were to blame. The minds of

many of their brethren were hurt, and a cry was instantly raised against us as abusing the liberty we enjoyed of worshipping God in our meeting-houses to the purposes of political discussion. But whatever their fault might be in thus going beyond their line, it is illiberal to the last degree to set it down to the account of the general body of Dissenters.

But it is your revolution dinners, said the Churchman, that I have chiefly in view. These, if I am not greatly misinformed, have been conducted in a very indecent and riotous manner —multitudes of people of every description collected together —little ceremony observed in their manner of partaking of the festivity—a long train of toasts after dinner—speeches, motions, songs, clappings, and parading with colours through the hall—mounting the tables, knocking down glasses, and the like. And this I understand is called the revolution society, where the cause of freedom is asserted, the rights of man defended, the measures of government canvassed, the tyranny of kings and aristocrats reprobated, and the glorious French revolution cried up to the skies. Yea more, from this said revolution society, I am told, have issued messages and letters of congratulation to many Jacobin societies abroad, and to the national convention itself.

Why really, Sir, replied the Dissenter, one would suppose from your account of this society, that it was instituted by the Dissenters, upon some previously digested plan, for the purpose of discussing political questions, opposing the measures of government, and fomenting a spirit of disaffection and sedition. But I can assure you this is not the fact. The truth is, a circle of friends, chiefly Dissenters, have been used for many years past to dine together on the fourth of November, for the sole purpose of commemorating the glorious revolution in the year 1688. The company, as I understand, was rarely numerous, the entertainment plain, and the whole conducted with decency and cheerfulness. But even in this state of the business there were many serious Dissenters, who had their objections to this meeting upon the general ground of its tendency to promote levity and dissipation.

Within however eight or ten years past it hath greatly changed its complexion. From a select it hath become a mixed

company. People of high rank have sanctioned it with their presence. Many speeches have been made, the occasion of the festival furnishing copious matter for men of talents to dilate upon. The principles of the revolution have been investigated, and the king's health having been drank, the immortal memory of king William toasted, the peers and other distinguished characters present complimented, and a song or two sung, the company have broke up.

These meetings thus increasing from year to year, and consisting of people of different descriptions and views, and who were too many of them disposed to be noisy and clamorous, as is the case in most public companies; these meetings, I say, thus deranged could no longer be called meetings of Dissenters, nor with propriety the Revolution Society. So the irregularities took place of which you speak, and which no doubt were greatly exaggerated by report. Many that were used to attend them, not a little disgusted, withdrew. And I hear at their last meeting, there were few respectable characters among them.

Thus you have, Sir, the best account I can give you of these revolution dinners, their origin, and the manner in which they have been conducted. And I leave you to judge, whether it would not be very illiberal to charge the Dissenters as a body with irregularities, which it was by no means in their power to correct or control. I will only add, that the more serious part of them have beheld these things with no small concern and regret.

To-morrow, Sir, said the Churchman, we shall I hope hear what you have to say upon the business of your applications to parliament, for the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts.

Thus, my dear Jack, you have our second afternoon's discourse. If you are tired of this tale tell me, otherwise you may perhaps be at the expence of another letter or two from

Yours, &c.

LETTER V.

DEAR JACK,

MY good old grandmother, I remember, used to tell us children, that the way to be good Christians, was to call over in our memories when we came from church what the parson had been saying: she therefore always expected an account of the sermon on Sunday evening. Now the long sermon which our Non-Con parson has given us in our way hither, I have been diligently recollecting; and if to be a good Christian is not only to fear God, but to live in charity with our neighbour, I do assure you the recollection of his discourse has had a very beneficial effect with me in this way.

These Dissenters I have been taught to consider as a very obstinate self-willed people, governed more by humour than reason; but I am now convinced that they have a great deal to say for themselves, and are men of principle and conscience. I took it for granted, that they were of a dissatisfied, restless, contentious disposition, but I am now persuaded that, whatever may be the cast of some few among them, who by their imprudent and clamorous behaviour, have brought the character of the whole into question, they are, the generality of them, peaceable and friendly, loyal subjects, and good members of society. And if we may judge of the rest by the gentle and obliging manners of him who has held forth to us these two or three days past, I shall no more set them down for a morose, severe, and unyielding people. Indeed I am on tip toe to join them. What say you? But hold—we must have a turn or two more with them before we yield. You will therefore allow me to go on with my tale——

My brother Churchman, soon after entering our coach the third day, made a candid acknowledgment to the Dissenter, that what he had alleged the preceding day in favour of himself and his brethren, had in a good measure effaced the ill impressions which a too credulous regard to public report had made on his mind. But you will excuse me, continued he, if I still feel

myself hurt by your late management in the business of the repeal of the Corporation and Test Laws. The eagerness with which that matter was taken up, and the asperity and obstinacy with which it was pursued, I really think did you no honour. It injured your character, both for good sense and moderation, in the opinion of wise and thoughtful men.

Why, Sir, said the Dissenter, I have no doubt but on a cool dispassionate consideration of that matter, you will see reason to alter your mind, and to admit that we are not so much to blame as you have hastily imagined. Permit me to give you a general view of the history, nature, and intent of those laws; to submit to you my own opinion on the repeal of them; and then to enquire what judgment is to be passed on the measures the Dissenters took to that end.

The Corporation Act was passed about two years after the restoration, and from the preamble to it, as well as from the history of that period, it appears to have been levelled against the Protestant Dissenters. It declares that no person shall be elected into any corporation office, who shall not, within one year before such election, have taken the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, according to the usage of the church of England.

The Test Act was passed about ten years after the former, and was chiefly levelled against the Roman Catholics, though it comprehended the Protestant Dissenters in it *a*. It declares

a The history of this Act is curious, and cannot be better related than in the words of Mr. Beaufoy, in his speech in the House of Commons, March 28th, 1787, when he moved for the repeal of this and the Corporation Act. "In the year 1672, the people," says he, "were alarmed with an apprehension that the sovereign (Charles II.) had formed the design of subverting the established religion of this country. They had long known that his confidential friends were Catholics; that the prime minister, Lord Clifford, and the king's brother, the presumptive heir to the crown, were of this persuasion; and that the king himself was suspected of having secretly embraced the same hostile faith. But superadded to these different circumstances of alarm, they now saw an army under Catholic officers, in the depth of winter, encamped at the gates of London. A fact so extraordinary, which admitted but of one interpretation, filled their minds with uneasiness and extreme dismay, and in the pause of the first impression, induced legislature to pass the law that bears the title of an act for preventing the dangers which may happen from Popish recusants, but which is better known by the shorter name of the Test Act.

that every person who accepts a civil office or a commission in the army or navy, and who does not within the time prescribed by the act, take the sacrament of the Lord's Supper according to the usage of the church of England, shall be disabled in law, to all intents and purposes whatever, from occupying any such civil office, or for holding any such military commission; and if, without taking the sacramental qualification within the time prescribed by the act, he does continue to occupy a civil office, or to hold a military commission, and is lawfully convicted, then he not only incurs a large pecuniary penalty, but is disabled from thenceforth, for ever, from bringing any action in

"The minister, Lord Clifford, who was himself a Catholic, attempted to persuade the Dissenters to oppose the bill, upon the ground that its provisions were so worded as to extend to *them*, who were not in any respect the objects of the bill; and that nothing could be so unjust as to subject to the *penalties* of the law, a description of men who were not within the *meaning* of the law. The Dissenters admitted the force of the argument, but waved their right to its benefit; and one of the members of the city of London, who was himself a Dissenter, declared, on their behalf, that in a time of public danger, when delay might be fatal, they would not impede the progress of a bill which was thought essential to the safety of the kingdom; but would trust to the good faith, to the justice, to the humanity of parliament, that a bill for the relief of the Dissenters should afterwards be passed. The lords and the commons admitted, without hesitation, the equity of the claim. They considered the debt they had contracted to the Dissenters, as a debt of *honour*, the payment of which could not be refused; and accordingly a bill for their relief was passed; but its success was defeated by the sudden prorogation of the parliament.

"A second bill was brought in with a view to the same object, though by a different title, in the year 1680; and passed the two houses in consequence of the same implied compact. But while it lay ready for the royal assent, king Charles II. who was much exasperated with the Dissenters for refusing to support the Catholics, and who always delighted to obtain the most *unwarrantable ends* by the most *despicable means*, prevailed upon the clerk of the crown to steal the bill, and over-reach the parliament. The court exulted in the success of the expedient, and thought it a happy way of getting rid of a disagreeable measure. But that relief to the Dissenters, which neither the obvious equity of their claim, nor the countenance given to it by parliament could extort from king Charles II. the magnanimity of William III. was impatient to bestow: for, in one of his early speeches from the throne, he expressed his earnest hope that such alteration would be made in the law, as would leave room for the admission of all his Protestant subjects who were willing and able to serve him." See Beaufoy's speech on a motion for the repeal of the Corporation and Test-Laws, March 28, 1787, p. 16—19. Printed for Cadell, in the Strand, and Robinson, Paternoster-Row.

course of law, from prosecuting any suit in any court of equity, from being guardian of any child, or executor or administrator of any person, as well as from receiving any legacy.

Now upon this statement of the Corporation and Test Laws, it is natural to ask in the first place, Ought a man to be deprived of his just right (for eligibility to places of trust and profit in the state, is the just and natural right of every good subject,) ought, I say, a man to be deprived of it, purely because he conforms not to the rites and ceremonies of the church of England? We say, certainly not. His nonconformity for reasons of conscience, the sincerity of which no one has a right to question, is surely no crime. And ought a man to be punished for what is no crime? Nor is either his ability for serving his country, or his integrity, in the least affected by his nonconformity.

But, say you, a man's holding principles which manifestly tend to the dissolution of the state, is a reason why he should not be admitted to an office of dignity and power, which may enable him to carry those principles into effect. True. And this is a reason why a Roman Catholic, who avows principles which are acknowledged on all hands to affect the peace and the very existence of the state, should be declared ineligible by the law to such stations. But no such reason exists in regard of Protestant Dissenters. They are hearty friends of the constitution and of the royal family, and warm assertors of civil and religious liberty, and therefore good subjects of the state.

But, say you, they are hostile to the church. They do not indeed approve of the constitution, discipline and forms of the church of England: but it does not thence follow that they consider it as their duty at all events to attack the hierarchy. Far from it. Whoever rightly understands their principles will clearly see, that the church of England has very little danger of that kind to apprehend from the Dissenters. For if they do not approve, as is the fact, of national establishments of religion, it follows that they have no wish that their own or any other form of religion should be substituted in the room of that which now exists. They admit that the majority have a right to adopt what mode of worship they please, and are sensible that that which obtains is generally agreeable. Is it probable then, that the Dissenters, considering how small a proportion they bear

to the general body of the community should, when admitted to offices in the state, be eager to bring forward a change against the sense of the majority, and which when it had taken place would not come up to their idea?

But, Sir, were the church exposed to much greater danger than it really is, to contend that the just and natural rights of men are to be sacrificed to its safety, is doing an irreparable injury to its honour. This reasoning, followed to its utmost length, will not fail to carry you to downright intolerance and persecution. I cannot therefore but think the Corporation Act unjust and oppressive.

But if it be necessary, for the security of the church, to deprive the Dissenters of their natural right, it is pity but some other method of discriminating between a Churchman and a Dissenter were devised, than that of obliging all who are admitted to places of trust and profit in the state, to take the sacrament according to the rites of the church of England. For this test is not fully adequate to the purposes of its appointment. In its operation it does prodigious injury to an infinite multitude of people. And I must add that it is a manifest prostitution of that sacred rite.

It is not adequate to the ends of its appointment. For though it keeps out men of honour and conscience, and so by the way pays them a high compliment while it robs them of their just right, it proves too feeble a barrier against men of the contrary description; and such there will be among all bodies of people. These, while they call themselves Dissenters, will not scruple when a lucrative place offers, to go to the parish church and take the sacrament. And so, after all your endeavours to keep out the Dissenters, you are sure to have those of them with you who are of a questionable character, while the truly meritorious are excluded. It is also to be remembered that there are worthy men among them, who as they have no conscientious objection to occasional conformity, so think they ought to qualify when called upon to serve a burdensome office in the state. Thus you see the test is insufficient to the ends of its appointment.

But its greatest evil lies in obliging men of all descriptions, in order to their holding lucrative places, to take the sacrament.

And does it not chill your blood, Sir, to see a professed infidel, a debauched lieutenant in the army or the navy, or an exciseman that perhaps scarce ever thought of religion in his life; to see people of such marked characters entering the church, approaching the altar, and demanding the bread and wine at the hand of the minister for the purpose just mentioned? And how hard is the service required of the minister, who, if he declines administering the sacrament to persons he suspects to be profane or immoral, runs the risk of an action in our courts of law!

And indeed I should think a sober man, who has not been used to communicate monthly at his parish church, must feel rather uncomfortably when his conscience twits him with the thought, that nothing urged him to his duty but a mere worldly consideration. I thought, said a certain gentleman of feeling in this predicament, when I heard the clerk with a loud voice desire those who came to qualify, to draw off to the left side of the altar by themselves, that he might attest on oath the fact of their qualification; I thought, said he, of the last judgment, and could not get the idea a long while out of my mind, of being ordered to the left hand of the Judge.

And now, Sir, is it not a great evil, to throw in the way of thousands of thoughtless people a temptation to act contrary to the convictions of their conscience; or to be accessary to their admitting an idea infinitely injurious to their most important interests, that religion is a mere engine of the state? No pains need be taken to prove that our Lord Jesus Christ did not institute this sacred rite to be a qualification for a secular employment, but that the objects he proposed were of a very different nature. This abuse therefore of the institution may be justly called a prostitution of it.

Such, in my opinion, is the true reasoning upon the question respecting the Corporation and Test Laws. And you will now, Sir, perhaps wonder to hear me express some indifference about the repeal of them; but you will cease to do so, when I tell you that it is owing to the anxiety I feel for the probable consequences of that event, should it take place. Laws so contrary to equity and sound policy I have no doubt ought to be repealed. Nor could I, under this conviction, hesitate a moment upon the part I ought to take, had I any influence to

procure the repeal of them. But the effect it will be likely to have upon the Dissenters, considered both in a religious and civil capacity, ought not to be overlooked; and the rather, as the seriously weighing it may have an influence to guard us against the evils to be apprehended, to check a too eager pursuit of the object, and to reconcile us to a disappointment, should that be the event.

We have been used to tell our people that prosperity, through the folly and perverseness of the human heart, is often unfriendly to religion, and therefore ought not to be too eagerly coveted; and that adversity, duly operating as a remedy for our ill humours, is friendly to it, and therefore ought not to be unreasonably dreaded. This you may call puritanical language, but it is not the less just, nor is it very unlike that which our Master used when he told his disciples, that *through many tribulations they must enter into the kingdom*, and that *they who will live godly in Christ Jesus must suffer persecution.*

Not that we mean to court persecution. So we have been represented by a famous wit of your church. But I assure you, Sir, we have not yet learned the trick of "crying to the next person we meet in the street, Worthy Sir, do me the honour of a good slap in the chaps; and then going home and boasting of what we have undergone for the public good." Nor yet have we learned the other trick he imputes to us, "of aiming to bring our tatters into fashion in court and city, and of getting on a great horse and eating custard." The hypocrisy of the former we detest, and the great evil of the latter is what I tremble at, as the possible consequence, through the levity of the human heart, of the repeal of the Corporation Act.

I may perhaps be more timid than some other people, but I cannot get rid of my fears that your corporation feasts, with all their attendant circumstances of dissipation and folly, may prove a snare to the virtue and piety of a Dissenter. Should a revolution in their general character for serious religion be the unhappy effect of their admission to places of profit and honour, whatever services some of them may render the state, the evil in my opinion will scarcely be compensated thereby. It behoves them however seriously to consider the risk they would in that case run.

The public, I am sensible, would be greatly benefited by the ability and virtue of those who are by this law rendered incapable of serving their country in this line: a consideration which ought to have its due weight with those in whose option the repeal of it lies. But if they are not in a disposition to comply, be their reasons what they may, the Dissenters are not chargeable with any neglect of duty on their part to the public; and should console themselves with the reflection, that the denial of their just claims, taking place by the permission of divine Providence, may prove an occasion of infinite advantage to themselves and their posterity.

But if the prospect of honour and emolument be the sole motive with any of them to the ardent efforts used to gain this point, it is a sad symptom, I must acknowledge, of the declension of real piety among us. To see men of any description grasping at shadows is unpleasant: but how much more men whose pious ancestors treated all these things with indifference, and, in a comparative view, with contempt; and whose greatest glory it was to renounce the world for the sake of a good conscience! and I will add men, who (amidst their eagerness to acquire these baubels) boast they account it an honour to be a Dissenter! But why so unhappy under these disabilities, unpleasing as they may be? The inconveniencies we suffer thereby are of trifling account, when compared with the fines, imprisonments, and other cruel abuses which our fathers of the last century endured. We have free liberty to worship God according to our conscience, and for that liberty, though I am as sensible as any man that it is our natural and just right, we ought to be thankful to God, and to those who have it in their power to deprive us of it.

There is, Sir, an old fashioned book called the Bible, which tells us the witnesses, by whom I understand all the sincere friends of virtue and piety, are for a certain time to prophesy, or bear their testimony to the truth, in sackcloth. That time, it is I believe on all hands acknowledged, is not yet run out. Sackcloth is not indeed a pleasant garment. But why in such a hurry to throw it off? I had much rather appear dressed in it when my Master comes, than arrayed in the most fashionable and expensive garment of the present times. Would to God

the Dissenters now possessed that dignity of character, which reflected such immortal glory upon the countenances and names of an infinite number of witnesses that have gone before them!

But, Sir, the Dissenters are to be considered in their civil as well as religious capacity. And in this view of them they are a respectable body of people, and have weight and influence, as they ought to have in the community. The church of England is sensible of this, and hath more than once acknowledged herself indebted to their seasonable interpositions in her favour, for deliverance from impending ruin. I refer to the very period when the Test Act, which deprives them of their just and natural claims, was passed; and to the revolution in 1688. So that in effect they may be said to have been the saviours both of the church and of their country. They are therefore a body of people that ought to be looked up to with respect.

But when this barrier, which impolicy as well as injustice hath set up against them, is destroyed, they will mingle with the general mass of the people, and lose all their former consideration and importance in society. They are now a compact body, cemented by one common civil interest, but, that band once dissolved, their union will instantly cease. And upon their admission into the great world, they will no doubt be complimented by their opponents in much the same manner, that two champions in the lower house complimented each other upon their being called up to the higher, "My Lord, I give you joy: we are now equally insignificant." These things I think it my duty to say, because no argument should be withholden to persuade legislature to abolish laws which I believe to be unjust, to be occasions of great evil to mankind, and to be most offensive to Almighty God. But then I say them with regret, for the dread I have of the consequences already stated as likely to result from the repeal of them.

The Churchman heard with patience this long discourse, and acknowledged he felt the force of the reasoning; but still, said he, I must insist that your application to parliament was conducted in a very imprudent manner, and accompanied with circumstances censurable, in a high degree. Had you come forward in the temper we have now talked over the matter, you would, in my opinion, have disarmed your opponents of the only

plausible reason they had for denying your request. They did not mean by urging the continuance of these laws to criminate the Dissenters, as Dissenters, or to insist that they were not entitled to the natural rights of good subjects. The merits of the abstract question they were not disposed to debate. All they meant to say was, that when things are so circumstanced, that the continuance of a law, which bears hard upon a particular description of men, is necessary to the security of the church and the peace of the state; then the refusing to repeal it is a duty incumbent on legislature.

Of the fallacy of this position, continued the Churchman, I am sufficiently convinced by your reasoning. But the position once admitted, the business was to fix upon you the charge of implacable enmity against the church, and a factious disposition to disturb the peace of the state. The strong language therefore you held of not asking a favour, but insisting on your right; your associating all over the kingdom for the purpose of enforcing your demand; your refusing your votes for candidates at elections, if they did not at all events promise you their support; your angrily replying, at least some of you, in the affirmative, when asked whether you had not yet farther demands; and the wrathful temper you betrayed on the failure of your application, so acrimoniously expressed by Dr. Priestley in a pamphlet published by him on that occasion; these charges did not fail to be improved against you. And I must confess your conduct appeared to me exceedingly imprudent, though it might not merit the description some were disposed to give it of insult. Against these evils it behoved you to have been on your guard.

I do not mean, Sir, replied the Dissenter, to justify these measures; they were ill advised. But still you will not so much wonder at them, when you reflect that those who urged them, fully satisfied of the justice of their cause, felt for the injury done them more sensibly than you or even many of their own brethren did; and that their resentments were aggravated by a recollection that their just rights had been withheld upwards of a century, and that their applications from time to time for redress, however mild and respectful, had not only failed of success, but been treated as the mere effect of a party and factious spirit. These things, considered, it was not so much to

be wondered at that warm and hasty men should be eager to change the mode of application, to summon together all their force, to go to parliament with a louder and firmer tone than formerly, to insist boldly on their right, and to resolve at all events not to recede from their claim.

But, Sir, I am persuaded, continued the Dissenter, had they deliberated coolly on the business, they would have seen the mistake of adopting such measures. Where is the wisdom, when suing my right of one who has it in his power to withhold it, to address him after a manner that shall rouse his resentments, and give him an opportunity of changing his ground from the question of my claim, to a charge he has to exhibit against me of insult and abuse? What necessity was there for demanding the sense of all the Dissenters through the kingdom, upon a question to which all the world knew not one of them, unless an utter stranger to the Corporation and Test Laws, could give a negative? Where was the prudence of putting forward meetings every where, which consisting of people of very different religious opinions, were scarce likely all of them to be so pleasant and harmonious, as was at such a time especially to be wished? If the gentlemen whose vicinity to parliament rendered them the fit persons to conduct the business, if these gentlemen were competent to it, what need of delegates from all parts, unless it had been the wish to embarrass rather than assist them? And what advantage was to be expected from calling forth our whole force to view, except that of exposing our weakness? It is marvellous to me that men of sense should not have reverted to these considerations, or, if they did, that the force of them was not duly felt.

But more than this. If it must be made a point of to catechize candidates at elections, and to tell them, if they would not vote for the repeal of these laws, they should not have our support; could any other be expected than that our opponents would do their utmost to prevent any Dissenter from getting into the house? And upon balancing the account, on this part of the business, which were most likely to be the gainers, they or we?

The menacing language, I will add, of those men who said that the object of this application to parliament was of very

trifling consideration in comparison of other matters they had to bring forward, was language, considered merely in its operation on the question of repeal, the most absurd that was ever held by men who had the least pretension to reason. But it was the language of a very few, and I am confident unauthorized by any the smallest body of people among us. As to the pamphlet you refer to of Dr. Priestley's, it should be remembered that it was written in the moment of disappointment, and was afterwards candidly acknowledged by himself to have been entirely his own production, without the privity of any one.

And now, Sir, having treated this question in a manner that will secure me from the charge of partiality to my own connections, the Dissenters, I will boldly step forward and put a few plain questions to you, a Churchman, not doubting that the reply will be perfectly to my satisfaction. I ask then, Do you in your conscience think, that these warm measures, however imprudent and reprehensible, and which were far from being approved of by the generality of Dissenters, have merited the treatment they have met with from the advocates of your church? Put yourself in our situation, denied as we certainly are, or however fully believe ourselves to be, of a just and natural claim, and say, Whether the intemperate heats of some among us in their application for redress, do furnish clear proof that the body of Dissenters are a sour, peevish set of people, contentious and seditious, of a vindictive temper, and sworn enemies to the church, if not to the king and constitution? The most unequivocal proofs we have given to the contrary, by our public and authentic declarations, and by our known and marked conduct on many memorable occasions. Is not therefore such a charge most unfair and unjust?

And even as to those among us whose conduct has been the most deserving of censure, I ask, Has it been such as will justify the raising a cry against them, that could scarce fail of bringing after it the destruction of their places of worship, and their property, if not of their lives? The miserable drunken mob, who committed such horrid devastation at Birmingham, were deserving of exemplary punishment. But the men, who under a pretence of zeal for the church and the king, instigated them to these devastations, were deserving of much greater:

for while they malevolently abused the Dissenters, they shamefully libelled the names they pretended to venerate, and in effect told the world that the church, under whose banner they would be thought to fight, was intolerant, vindictive, and cruel.

If, replied the Churchman, the principles of the church of England were such as I acknowledge the conduct of those men did, by manifest implication, impute to it, I would no longer consider myself a member of it, but instantly become a Dissenter.—But I see we are just got to our inn. In the afternoon I shall wish to hear what you have to say to the charge, of having taken an unjustifiable part in the French revolution.

Thus you have, my friend, our third day's morning conversation. That of the afternoon, and which will be the last, I mean to send you by the next post from hence, for our captain tells us the wind is still against us, and probably will be so for some days yet.

I am your's, &c.

LETTER VI.

I SEND you, my dear Jack, by this post, an account of the last round fought by our two combatants. The odds have for some time been in favour of the Dissenter, and you will find, at the close of this letter, the company have decreed him the palm. My brother Churchman, I assure you, has not yielded dishonourably on any point, and what pleases me most of all is, that the business was finished with great good humour. Having had an excellent dinner the set-to this afternoon was without any symptom of hostility. Our good lady, who had said little hitherto in the course of the debate, pleasantly observed that she had had her chirurgical instruments in readiness, her plaister and scissars, but there had been so few wounds given or received on either side, that she had put them up, persuaded that there would be no occasion for them at all. The combatants each thanked her for her goodness and proceeded,

The charge, said the Churchman, which I told you in the morning, I had yet to exhibit against the Dissenters, would be "the part they are reported to have taken in the French revolution; from whence it hath been concluded that they are not unfriendly to republicanism."

Before we proceed, replied the Dissenter, it will be necessary to remind you again, Sir, of what has been more than once observed in our talk, that the Dissenters always have been, and still are, hearty friends of limited monarchy, or of that form of government which obtains in this country. It is a constitution which, in its due state, affords the best security to the rights and liberties of the subject, and possesses both the principles and means which are essential to its permanence and improvement: and on these two accounts hath the advantage of all other forms of government. In this opinion I am confirmed by the little knowledge I have of ancient and modern history. And I am well persuaded it is a form of government that, of all others, best suits the principles, genius, and temper of the British nation. Having said this, allow me to make some remarks on the French revolution, which will prepare the way for a consideration of the particulars you have to object to the conduct of the Dissenters in reference to this business.

The state of the French nation, at the commencement of this extraordinary change in their affairs, was truly wretched. This I believe is allowed on all hands. Their revenue through extravagance and mismanagement exhausted, and on the point of bankruptcy—Their parliaments denied freedom of debate, and required to register the edicts of the sovereign, however contrary to their judgment and conscience, at the peril of banishment—The people loaded with taxes, unequally laid and oppressively levied—Justice administered partially, slowly, and in many instances arbitrarily—The freedom of the press under absolute restraint—Individuals, on a mere suspicion of being inimical to the measures of the court, suddenly seized by Letters de Cachet, and sent into confinement, without the means or possibility of obtaining legal redress—Great irregularities among the clergy and religious orders—Liberty of conscience denied—And the Protestants, once a famous and flourishing people, whose ancestors possessed large property, of which they

were most unjustly and cruelly deprived by the revocation of the edict of Nantes; these not only shut out from all influence in the state, but absolutely prohibited worshipping God according to their conscience—These and many other evils, too numerous and complicated to be recited, did that unhappy people groan under.

And now can it be thought strange that they should wish to be emancipated from their bondage, and to enjoy freedom and happiness? But what was their idea of freedom and happiness? It was—security to their persons and property—liberty to do what they pleased, provided they injured not their neighbour—a right to choose those to whom should be confided the power of making laws, and disposing of such portion of their property as was necessary for the service of the state—elegibility to offices of trust, profit, and honour—the freedom of the press—liberty to worship God after the manner they thought right, without controul from any quarter whatever—and the total abandonment of all idea of conquest over other nations, or of giving law to any other state than their own. These were the wishes of the sober and temperate part of the people. And what wise and good man but must acknowledge them to be founded in the soundest principles of equity and policy?

The question then was, By what means, circumstanced as the French nation was at the time we speak of, these advantages, so truly desirable, were to be acquired?—By a reform?—Or by a total change in the constitution? The latter was resolved on. But it has always struck me, that previous to that resolution, the following questions should have been seriously considered and accurately investigated.

In the first place, What is the present state of human nature, or the prevailing character of mankind? Government, at least the warm disputes that have been agitated about government, manifestly suppose that man is not merely an imperfect but depraved being. Unwilling as some may be to admit this, it is a fact which history, and what we continually observe around us, prove beyond all reasonable doubt. Ambition, avarice, lust of power, self-will, domination, cruelty, and revenge, are the horrid sources whence all the miseries in society originate. Nor do these passions mark the characters of a few only. They are not peculiar to this, that, or the other country; they are to

be met with more or less every where. Insomuch that we may affirm, without breach of charity, they domineer over the far greater part of mankind. When therefore the regeneration of a kingdom is in contemplation, it is as unphilosophical as it is unchristian to thrust this fact from our view, or to give it only a transient attention.

He that builds his house well should well consider the materials of which it is to be built, and, if he means to erect a complete and durable edifice, whether they are of a kind every way suited to his purpose, or capable of being fashioned to that idea of perfection he has framed. Supposing the greater part of the French nation to be under the prevailing influence of the passions just mentioned, ought it not to have been carefully considered, whether this depravity of character would not defeat the object? Or if not, in what degree it would obstruct the regeneration of the aggregate body—a vast kingdom consisting of four or five and twenty million of people? Had this been duly attended to, I am of opinion the question between a reform and a total change of constitution, would have been held a little longer in suspence. Nor would the general cause of liberty have suffered thereby.

Another question to have been asked, and very particularly considered, should no doubt have been—What is the peculiar discriminating character of the French nation? All the wise legislators of antiquity, such as Solon and Lycurgus, paid great attention to this question in framing laws for different states: and they considered its importance in the business of bringing about a revolution, or absolute change in the constitution as very great indeed. It ought therefore to have had its due weight here.

Voltaire has I think somewhere told us, that a Frenchman is either a monkey or a tyger. Their levity is universally acknowledged even to a proverb. And they have lately given striking proofs of their inhumanity. Now, I admit, these passions were likely enough to prove favourable to a change in the state. But was it not as probable that, in the course of their operation to effect one change, they might, under the skilful management of interested leaders, be directed to another, and so throw the whole into confusion? This has turned out to be

the case. One constitution has succeeded another, and the change has not failed to be strongly marked with levity and cruelty. What the event of the whole will be time will show.

The opposition they were likely to meet with among themselves, was also deserving of serious consideration. Although the levity of the French might prove favourable, in their oppressed state, to a change, it was not probable that the prejudices of the greater part of them in favour of monarchy, would be easily subdued. France had been governed by kings time immemorial, and amidst all changes had been famous for its attachment to the sovereign. I can remember an old Huguenot, who, notwithstanding all his family had suffered from the proscription of Lewis XIV. was used to speak with complacency and a kind of national vanity of the grand monarque. The court with its numerous dependants, the princes of the blood, the noblesse, and the clergy, formed a powerful body; and there could be no doubt that the idea of a new constitution would, on various accounts, inflame their passions to the greatest degree. These difficulties therefore ought to have had their due weight in a question of such moment. Again,

The relative state of the country in regard to all the other nations of Europe, merited very particular attention. France is an independant state, and has most certainly a right to determine for itself what form of government it shall adopt. But when the total abolition of a constitution, that had existed for ages, was in contemplation, it was natural to suppose that neighbouring states might be apprehensive, that consequences would result from thence injurious to their safety; and that upon this account, as well as of the amity that subsisted between them and the reigning monarch, an interference on their part might be justified. Whether such reasoning was just is not the question here. But surely policy required, that so formidable an opposition as that of all the powers of Europe, an event by no means improbable, should be viewed with an attentive eye, and not treated with negligence and contempt. "Are we able to resist so mighty a force?" That was the question. And light from many quarters was necessary to enable a people, thus circumstanced, to determine aright upon it.

But the question which most of all required a cool, dispas-

sionate, and serious consideration, was this—Whether there was a probability of establishing a new constitution, at a less expence than that of a million of lives? and whether the advantage proposed would justify the running such a risk?

The loss of such a number of lives, in the course of this quarrel within and without the kingdom, was no chimerical idea. It must have forced itself upon the mind of every thoughtful man. And in considering the good to be opposed to this tremendous evil, a true statement was to be made of the comparative advantages of a reform and a new constitution. The new constitution we will suppose to be an immediate and perfect cure of the evils complained of; and a reform, such an one as they had influence and energy enough to secure, to be a remedy slow in its operation, but sure of restoring a tolerable degree of health to the state. Was not such a reform, with a saving of a million of lives, preferable to a constitution which, however good, must be purchased at this vast expence; and which when established would probably not possess powers sufficient to secure its permanence? Till they had by the most nice balancing of the scale determined this question, they were surely not to be justified in bringing forward a totally new constitution. What degree of regard they did pay to these considerations I pretend not to say. The resolution however was adopted, and the experiment, which has arrested the attention and engaged the passions of all Europe, is now in course of trial.

It is not to our present purpose, to enter into a particular detail of the several events which have succeeded each other in the course of this business; to enquire into the character, principles, and views of the men on all sides, who have had the chief concern in it; and to point out the excellencies and defects of the constitution decreed and published by the national assembly. The accurate developement of all these matters by some able historian, will furnish reflections philosophical, political, and moral, the most curious to inquisitive minds, and greatly interesting to society. I must not, however, quit the subject without observing, that the several probable obstacles just mentioned to the establishment of a new constitution, which ought to have been held in full view by the leaders at the eve of it, have been realized in all their importance.

—The depraved passions of human nature have operated every where in their full force. Ambition, domination, and revenge, have not failed to feed the flame which discord has kindled in France and the neighbouring nations, and to spread the conflagration through almost all Europe.

—The characteristic genius of the French hath marked every step in the progress of the revolution, and has had no small influence on the rapid changes that have taken place. Levity, perfidy, and inhumanity have obstructed the counsels and measures of their legislators, ministers, and generals, abolished the constitution established by the first national assembly, thrown the succeeding into confusion, and threatened with an imperious tone the existence of the present convention. The gaiety of fetes, processions, festivities, and theatrical amusements, hath been mingled with all the horror of bloody massacres, and the sad catastrophe of a murdered monarch.

—The strong prejudices of a considerable part of the kingdom in favour of the old government, have not failed to stimulate the emigrants of all ranks, to every possible exertion for the recovery of their expiring cause; and to give energy to the secret practices of those within the kingdom, who have no scruple to dissemble their political sentiments, by oaths and reiterated expressions of zeal for republicanism.

—The powers of Europe, exasperated to the last degree, are leaguing against them, bringing mighty armies into the field, and putting out all their strength at sea.—In a word, the sacrifices already offered on the altar of discord, are in considerable advance towards the million of lives, which we said might be reasonably supposed would fall in this quarrel.

Can we take all these things into view, and not feel for the miseries of our fellow-creatures? Can we see the Seine tinged with blood on the tenth of August, and the streets running down with it the third of September? Can we follow the many thousands that have been led on to carnage like sheep to the slaughter? Can we behold some of the leaders in this wonderful revolution, of eminent abilities and possessed of mild and generous sentiments, ungratefully abandoned by their compatriots, denounced, threatened with assassination, and forced into exile? In fine, can we see a prince who, with all his faults, was

chargeable with neither obstinacy nor inhumanity; a prince, whose justification from every previous crime, was announced to all the world by their choice of him for their king; a prince, whom on that occasion they declared to be inviolable, and that what guilt it remained possible for him to contract, should be no otherwise punished than by dethronement; a prince, who at the moment of his dethronement was cast into a prison, where he became utterly incapable, had he been so disposed, of injuring the state; a prince, thus circumstanced, sentenced to death by men who challenged in their own persons the triple character of accuser, jury, and judge; can we, I say, see such a sacrifice immolated in the midst of one of the greatest cities in the world, and amidst the acclamations of a people who had often cried Viv' le Roi, without feeling indignation and exclaiming aloud—To what lengths will men's passions hurry them? Where will all these miseries end? It is the voice of God: he thunders and the nations tremble.

——————' rubente
' Dextera sacras jaculatus arces,
' Terruit urbem:
' Terruit gentes, grave ne rediret
' Sæculum Pyrrhæ'————

At the commencement of this memorable struggle for liberty I rejoiced—rejoiced in the hope that we should quickly see a wretched people emancipated from their bondage, and put in possession of their just rights—I rejoiced in the prospect of happiness being more universally and equally enjoyed—I rejoiced, above all, at the thought, that the captivity in which the Roman hierarchy had held the consciences of men, was now about to be led captive, and the light of truth, both natural and divine, was just dawning on this wretched kingdom, and would quickly dispel the horrid mists of ignorance and vice which had for ages darkened and polluted it.

It was my wish that the constitution of this country might, in its most perfect state, rise into existence in that; and it was my hope that, in the progress of their affairs, such would be the event. When monarchy and democracy were blended, I flattered myself with the notion that in a course of time, feeling the necessity of an intermediate order of men to preserve the ba-

lance between those two powers, and to give energy to government, they would restore under proper restrictions an aristocracy, and so subdue the resentments and secure the allegiance of men of large property and distinguished merit. The new American republic, for which they professed so high a regard, has seen the necessity of such a change in their constitution; and in that, which now consists of president, senate, and house of representatives, the French had a model before them, which would probably catch their attention and engage their imitation.

These were ideas which suggested themselves to a mind, that heartily wished well to the cause of liberty and of just subordination in society. And so long as these prospects were in the least degree probable, though perhaps you, Sir, would have deemed them chimerical, they were consoling to one who looked forward with horror to all the confusions and miseries of civil discord. But alas! they are now totally overcast and dissipated. The jacobins, those sworn enemies of every form of government but that of an imperious and tyrannical democracy, have silenced every feeling of humanity, hung out the bloody flag of massacre, summoned all the powers of intrigue, cruelty, and death, to their standard, and devoted with unrelenting malice to destruction the very men whom the other day they applauded as the saviours of their country. Such conspiracies, such outrages have gone directly, as Cicero says of certain dissentions in the Roman state, *non ad commutandam, sed ad delendam rempublicam.*

What then in this state of things is to be wished for?—That the sword of confederate princes should bathe itself in the blood of innocent thousands, and with this tremendous sacrifice avenge the injustice done by these miscreants to their king and country?—Or, that the counsels of Marat and the arms of Dumourier should lay waste the neighbouring provinces, and then plunge this kingdom into the same wretched state of anarchy and ruin their own is now in? The latter calamity every sober man must surely deprecate. And if the former takes place, while we approve the sufferings of the guilty, and rejoice that peace is again restored to Europe; we shall see reason, considering the vicissitude of human affairs, to rejoice with trembling.

Should that spirit of domination, which has ever marked the court of Rome, and received its principal support from thence, which has shown itself in various forms even in many Protestant states, and to which the principles of the revolution in 1688 were opposed; should that spirit, I say, again prevail through Europe, a thoughtful man, who has in recollection the history of past times, who is sensible that human nature is now much the same it was formerly, and who attentively reads his Bible, will not be greatly surprised or unduly dismayed. It is good to be prepared for all events.

Tyranny over men's persons and property hath usually originated in unjust claims on conscience. And to compass the former, some pretence hath ever been found to justify the latter. The sources of knowledge have been obstructed, and pains been taken to persuade men that their interest was consulted in not allowing them to think and judge for themselves. Such has been the rise and progress of despotism among mankind. The late improvements therefore in philosophy are to be greatly valued, not only on their own account, but on that of their happy effect to promote free enquiry, and so to beget love of liberty; objects these of great importance in the apprehension of every intelligent and sensible man, and of every truly liberal and generous mind.

But it is possible that speculative men may have boasted too much of their improvements in knowledge, and the friends of liberty may have placed too great confidence in the liberal spirit of the times. There are yet those who have not given up the monopoly of science, nor consented that the trade of free enquiry should be thrown open. And there are those who still confound, and choose to do so, the terms of liberty and licentiousness. Lust of power is not yet extinguished in the bosoms of monarchs, aristocrats, or democrats: neither is despotism, under either of these standards, yet driven out of the world. The lion hath not learned to lie down with the lamb, nor the leopard with the kid. Good men have ever been and still are in the minority, and Providence has yet great purposes to accomplish, ere they rise into that state of respectability in which they shall by and by be placed. God means yet to confound the wisdom of the wise, and to bring to nought the un-

derstanding of the prudent, that no flesh should glory in his presence.

Should philosophers then be disappointed, and the old spirit of domination again prevail, it ought not to be thought strange. Nor let good men in this case be unduly cast down. It will be a consoling reflection to their minds in the day of trial, that they have so demeaned themselves in society, as not by any imprudent, unseasonable, or unjustifiable effort to have irritated and inflamed an intolerant spirit, and so to have been accessary to its painful consequences. And it will be a comfort to them to believe that Providence, in the course of all human affairs, hath its eye steadily fixed on the closing scene, when the witnesses, the true friends of virtue and piety, though slain, shall rise again, and enjoy the fruits of justice, friendship, and piety in their noblest perfection. Let their eye also be fixed on that day, and so let them assume a courage becoming their characters, as champions in the cause of liberty, virtue, and religion. Let dignity mark their countenances, and serenity possess their breasts. Let them never shrink back from a profession of the truth, nor be ashamed of bearing their testimony to it, though it be in sackcloth. Let them defend both their own innocence, and the noble cause wherein they are engaged, with reason and the word of God; rejecting all other weapons or modes of defence, as not only ineffectual, but tending to animosity and confusion. The good man neither asks nor needs the aid of malevolent invective or clamorous abuse:

> 'Non eget Mauri jaculis neque arcu,
> 'Nec venenatis gravida sagittis,
> ——————pharetra.'

With joy let us all, who fear God, look forward, amidst our various speculations, to the glorious day before us, and not be unreasonably anxious about any intervening events, however unpleasant and contrary to our wishes.

To observe the influence of divine Providence in all the occurrences of life, especially those of the magnitude we have been speaking of, is the delight as well as duty of Christians: and, persuaded that such events are in perfect unison with the predictions of the Bible, they feel themselves disposed to place firm confidence in the great Governor of the world, and to ad-

dress their ardent prayers to him that *his kingdom may come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.* And it is the duty of men, in their collective as well as individual capacity, to regard and review the providence of God. The Greeks, Romans, and other Pagan nations carried their devotion even to superstition. Such excess must have been offensive to Heaven; but surely it was much less so than a total disregard if not absolute disavowal of the superintending influence of the Deity in human affairs.

The guilt of this kind which the French nation have contracted, amidst the tremendous convulsions of their empire, every thoughtful and pious man must have marked with concern and detestation. We have scarce heard from the beginning to the present time an appeal once made to God; his name mentioned in any of their documents, instructions, or decrees; or a prayer addressed to him for the guidance of their counsels or the success of their arms. The urgency of their affairs might require their assembling for the business of the state, on the day they had been accustomed to pay some regard to the Deity; but the gay amusements of the evening, instead of receiving a check at a time when reason and religion demanded the most serious reflection, have been encouraged and promoted. And even the notice of the Christian era seems to be expunged from their calendar. These circumstances, though of little account with some, have not failed to make unfavourable impressions on the minds of the sober and thoughtful part of mankind.

But it is time to pause. These general observations on the French revolution have, I fear, been carried to too great a length. The business, however, before us will I hope be shortened by this trespass on the patience of the company. Whatever objections you may have, Sir, continued the Dissenter, to our conduct on this extraordinary occasion, may, I think, now be easily obviated.

Why, Sir, replied the Churchman, I have nothing to object to the Dissenters, but what public report hath brought to my ears; and that I must acknowledge hath made an unfavourable impression on my mind, with respect to their temper and views. It has been said abroad, "that they of all people expressed the

greatest joy at the first news of the French revolution; that they have assembled in one place and another, on the annual day of festivity, to commemorate that event; that they have sent letters of congratulation to the national assembly and other societies in France, from whom they have received in return fraternal acknowledgments of affection, gratitude, and esteem; that they have not only assured them of their good wishes, but offered them all the assistance in their power, towards carrying on their design; and that Paine's book, so manifestly intended to excite sedition, they read with avidity, and circulated with no small attention and eagerness."

Before I reply to these charges, answered the Dissenter, you must allow me, Sir, to remind you of what I have more than once observed in the course of this debate, that the faults of individuals, be they what they may, ought not in justice to be imputed to the body to which they belong, or to be considered as affording a criterion of its general character and complexion. If indeed the letters of congratulation which you speak of, had been sent from the general body of Dissenters, or from any society consisting merely of Dissenters, there would be some force in this reasoning. But that is not the fact. Whatever, therefore, we have further to say on this subject, whether in a way of justification, excuse, or blame, is to be considered as applicable to individuals only.

This said, I beg your attention a moment to the following observations.—Every man has a right to inform himself of what is passing in the world, to speculate on public events, and reason with his neighbour about them. This I suppose none will deny. People may indeed spend more time than they ought in political enquiries, and pronounce too hastily on matters of which they can have only an imperfect knowledge. But though such conduct may be imprudent, it is not absolutely criminal, unless by their speculations they hurt their own affairs, or suffer themselves to be precipitated into undue heats, and thereby disturb the peace of society, and obstruct the prosperity of the state.

Nor is it to be wondered at, when great events take place in the world, that a thoughtful man should feel pleasure or pain, according to his apprehension of their nature and importance, and

the consequences they may be likely to draw after them. His benevolent concern for the welfare of mankind will not suffer him to be a mere spectator of such occurrences: they cannot fail of interesting his passions. What good man, when he first heard of the emancipation of the French nation from a disgraceful and cruel bondage, in which they had been held for many ages, but must feel joy? Was his joy criminal? Did he do wrong in expressing it to his neighbour? Or if he and a few friends thought fit to meet together for this purpose, without any the most distant views of creating or propagating an unfavourable idea of the British constitution, or disturbing the peace of society, where was the evil of such a meeting?

I admit that when in the progress of the French affairs, their new constitution began to be talked of by some, as a fit model for all the other nations of Europe to copy after, it was high time for the friends of their country to be upon their guard against every thing in their conduct, that might be construed by ill-disposed persons into a tendency to promote disaffection to government and sedition in society. I therefore highly disapprove of the letters of congratulation sent abroad, which you refer to: they were in my opinion, to say the best of them, very indiscreet, as they contributed not a little to inflame the passions of those, who were apprehensive that some ill designs were framing against this country. And if there were any offers made of support to the Jacobins or other French societies, every sober man must without hesitation condemn them.

The freedom of the press in every country ought to be held sacred; and no man who reasons soberly on questions either of philosophy, jurisprudence, or divinity, is deserving of censure. But he who shall in any country declare himself hostile to the established constitution of it, treat the characters of the distinguished supporters and defenders of it contumeliously, and avow his intention by circulating opposite theories of his own, to subvert it; can never surely expect to be treated in any other light, than as an offender against the state. What degree of this guilt falls to the lot of the much talked of Paine, no one who has attentively read his books can be at a loss to say. There are no doubt many truths contained in them; but the spirit that prevails through them, the reflections cast on the memory of

king William, and on his present Majesty, with many other matters that might be mentioned, bring him clearly within that statute of sound sense, as well as of the Bible, 'Thou shalt not revile the gods (or the rulers) of thy people.' And if such be the character of the books, and the avowed intention of their author, they who circulated them, knowing their contents, and wishing to promote his views, are justly chargeable with being guilty of seditious practices. "Whoever," says Mr. Locke, "either ruler, or subject, by force goes about to invade the rights of either prince or people, and lays the foundation for overturning the constitution and frame of any just government, is highly guilty of the greatest crime, I think, a man is capable of, being to answer for all those mischiefs of blood, rapine, and desolation, which the breaking to pieces of governments bring on a country. And he, who does it, is justly to be esteemed the common enemy and pest of mankind; and is to be treated accordingly."

The conduct which I before pointed out as indiscreet, and therefore reprehensible, is, I acknowledge, to be imputed to some among the Dissenters. And a few of them may possibly have imbibed republican principles, and so given occasion of suspicion, that they are not friendly to the constitution: but I hope none of them come within the charge of those seditious practices, which we have denounced as most unquestionably criminal. Of this I am sure, that such characters, if such there are, are held in detestation by the general body of Dissenters.

Indeed there is a strong presumption in favour of the Dissenters, that the reports invidiously circulated concerning them as a body, *cannot* be true: a presumption arising both from their *political* state and their *religious* character.

The situation in which their dissent from the church of England places them, is such as would render it highly imprudent in them, by an irritable and factious conduct, to bring their character for peaceableness and moderation into question with the state. Although they are in a state of legal security, yet that security they are considered as enjoying under the idea of an act of toleration. And would the minority, in any country, so egregiously trifle with their own happiness as wantonly to provoke those who have the power in their hands to deprive them

of their liberties; having at the same time no other excuse to make for the provocation given, than that their liberties being their natural right they are obliged to no man for them?

Their *religious* character likewise confirms the presumption, that the cry raised against them is not founded in truth. The Dissenters do no doubt differ among themselves upon many theological questions. And it is to be feared too many of them enter not into the spirit of the religion they profess: but it is otherwise I trust with the far greater part of them. And these, urged by infinitely nobler motives than merely those of a regard to their temporal security and happiness, consider it as their indispensable duty, not to say how congenial it is to their religious feelings, to copy after the example of their divine Master; every action of whose life was marked with the fair characters of meekness, peaceableness, self-denial, forgiveness, indifference to the world, and a generous concern for the welfare of mankind. With this bright pattern before their eyes, together with those of the primitive Christians, and of their own pious ancestors, who patiently endured seeing him who is invisible, and had respect to the recompence of reward; with these examples, I say, before their eyes, it is hardly to be imagined that they can be that restless, contentious, seditious kind of people, which too many have hastily and unjustly supposed them to be.

But the matter is not left on the ground of mere presumptive evidence. For their justification from these charges they appeal to their general conduct, and to their public acts. Go into their religious assemblies, Sir, where they are accustomed to make supplications, prayers, and intercessions for the king, and all that are in authority; and be a witness of the devotion with which they perform this part of their duty, acknowledging their obligation to lead peaceable lives in all godliness and honesty: a conduct which they are persuaded is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour.—In their addresses on various occasions, to his Majesty, they have not failed to express their duty, affection, and loyalty, after a manner becoming good subjects—And they have lately declared in the most explicit manner to all the world, that "they venerate the constitution of their country, are firmly attached to the present

royal family, revere the laws, and hold all factious and seditious practices in the greatest detestation."

Having said this, you will allow me, Sir, to add, that they are ready on all occasions, with the like sincerity and firmness to assert, that they steadily adhere to the principles of the revolution in 1688, as founded in the truest reason, and no way repugnant to the word of God. In these principles they have been instructed by their pious ancestors. In these they glory. And for these they contend with the greater earnestness, as they cannot forget that the intolerant and slavish principles opposed to them, have more than once endangered the constitution, had like to have prevented the accession of the present royal family to the throne, and by two rebellions shook the foundations of it.

And now lay your hand upon your heart, Sir, and say, Whether you think the principles of the Dissenters are such as give the least countenance to the reports which have been industriously spread concerning them, as a people whose very existence is dangerous to society? And whether you really think, that the imprudent, and if you will, criminal, conduct of some among them is such as can with justice fix a dishonourable and suspicious imputation on the whole? You will I am sure reply in the negative.

I am a friend of all mankind, a hearty lover of my country, and feel myself most affectionately concerned for the reputation, security, and happiness of the Dissenters, of which body I have the honour to be one. Were they, numerous as they are, all present, you should, Sir, for once hear a sermon from the lips of a nonconformist, to which I persuade myself they would pay a serious and cheerful attention, and which you would approve. It should be a short one, not of the length theirs are usually said to be. It should be this:

"—Read your Bible. Fear God, honour the king. Be subject to the higher powers, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake: to the king, as supreme, and unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so it is the will of God, that with well-doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. As free and not using your liberty as a

cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Render to all their due, tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Study to be quiet, and to do your own business. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Yes, he cometh, he cometh quickly; to call all men to account for the deeds done in the body. And be assured the question then will be, not whether you were an aristocrat or a democrat, whether you were for this or that form of government, or were of this or that political party; but whether you have been a faithful servant of God, a meek disciple of Christ, a well-wisher to all men, and a friend to your own immortal soul?" Such should be my sermon. And I repeat it again, the generality if not all of them, would, I am persuaded, cordially say, Amen.

The Churchman replied, I am satisfied, Sir, with your account of the Dissenters, and am fully convinced that their principles are founded in reason, and are in perfect unison with the doctrines and precepts of Christianity. You yield then, said the rest of the company the palm. I do, said he, with great cheerfulness. And whatever may have been my former prejudices against the Dissenters, I assure you, Sir, whenever in future I shall fall in company with any one of that persuasion, I shall presume, till I have full evidence to the contrary, that he is a sensible, peaceable, and pious man. The rest of the company with great good nature joined in this conclusion. And so our discourse on Dissenting-politics closed.

Thus you have, my friend, the issue of this business, and I am persuaded that with the reasoning thus stated to you, though a Churchman, you will not protest against the award given. If these long letters, on a subject perfectly new to you, have afforded you any amusement and instruction, I shall be happy; and you are at liberty to make what use of them you please.

I am yours, &c.

THE

BIRD OF PARADISE.

Ah me! I've lost my liberty;
And in this cage
My active mind
Is close confin'd:
Nor can I hope again
My birthright to obtain,
Till this my gilded tenement shall be
Destroy'd by some disaster or by age.

But—how came I here?
Who was it that depriv'd my heaven-born soul,
Of the freedom she enjoy'd
In the Paradise of God;
Where no base passion could my peace controul,
Or in my breast create a fear?
'Twas Satan, aye, 'twas he
That robb'd me of my liberty:
His artful snares th' insidious Fowler laid,
And to this captive state my innocence betray'd.

Cruel enemy to try,
When I fear'd no danger nigh,
Thus to deceive and ruin me,
With basest arts of treachery!
But boast not, Satan, thou thy point hast gain'd.
Heav'n permits it so to be,
That all the world may one day see
Justice triumphant over perfidy:
For know that Christ the conquest hath obtain'd.
Yes, and he'll quickly come,
And publicly pronounce thy doom.
So shall the horror of this cruel deed,
By which thy malice had design'd,
To draw down vengeance on mankind,
With double fury light on thy devoted head.

In the mean while I sit,
And here in groans,
And silent moans,
Lament my 'prison'd state:
Ah me! I once was us'd to mount and fly,
Up thro' the trackless regions of the sky;
And as I pass'd along
In sweetly pleasing strains,
To trill my warbling song,
All o'er the etherial plains.
But now condemn'd within this cage to lie,
I droop the wing,
Refuse to sing,
And sighing wish to die.

But why despair?
Come try thy voice, and stretch thy wing;
A bird within a cage may chirp and sing,
And taste what Freedom is e'en while she's here.
Strike up some cheerful note;
With fond desire
Peep through the wire:
Thy keeper 'll quickly come and let thee out.

This, oh this, is happy news!
Now to sing I can't refuse;
These shall be the notes I chuse:
" Satan the cruel Fowler put me in
" And fast enclos'd me round with sense and sin;
" But Satan cannot keep me here;
" For not to him the cage belongs,
" 'Tis Christ's, and he shall have my songs,
" Since He's my kind deliverer."

Thus awhile,
I will beguile
The passing hours away;
Assur'd my master 'll not forget
To make my bed and find me meat,
So long as 'tis decreed that here I stay.
Wherefore free from all cares,
From all dangers and snares,
While Jesus my Saviour is by;

O how happy I dwell,
Tho' immur'd in a cell,
Not anxious to live, nor yet fearful to die!

But soon, alas! secure of future bliss,
Senseless I grow,
And scarcely know
What real freedom is.
The little circuit of my cage
Doth all my thoughts and time engage:
With heedless feet from perch to perch I hop;
And passing round,
Pleas'd with the sound
Of tinkling bell,
Hung o'er my cell,
My nobler notes I drop.
Ah! how deprav'd this wretched heart of mine,
So soon to lose its taste for joys divine!

Busied thus with motes and straws,
Idle nonsense, empty joys,
Without a hope without a fear
Of pleasures or of dangers near,
Asleep I fall:
Fatal security!
But hark! I hear my keeper call.
Aye, 'tis his voice: now I awake,
Fancy I feel my prison shake,
And dire destruction's nigh.
Affrighted, round my cage I cast my eye,
And fluttering to and fro,
Not knowing where to go,
Attempt to make my escape but cannot fly.

Ah! silly heart,
(I fetch a sigh,
And sighing cry,)
Thus foolishly to part
With noble hopes, substantial joys,
For airy phantoms, gilded toys,
Trifles, the fond pursuit of which unman's my soul,
And leaves me to the sport of every fancied fear,
That would my peace controul.

What miseries befal a heav'n born mind,
By being thus within a cage confin'd!
Pity, Saviour, pity me,
And quickly come and set me free!

My Saviour hears, and straight replies
With soft compassion in his eyes,
" Thy silent moans,
" And piteous groans,
" Have mov'd my heart:
" Ere long I'll come
" And fetch thee home,
" Where reason and the passions ne'er shall part."

'Tis Jesus that speaks! how charming his name!
At the sound of his voice,
Oh how I rejoice
And kindle all into a flame!
I leap and I fly,
And in extasy cry,
Vain world I bid thee adieu:
I'll wait not for age,
To pull down my cage,
But fearless of danger, will force my way through.

Check thy passions foolish man;
The longest life is but a span.
Be contented here to stay,
Another hour, another day;
To feel a joy, to bear a pain,
To do some good, some good t' obtain.
Think not the moments long heaven hath decreed;
Impatience cannot lash them into speed.
With meek submission wait the approaching hour:
The wheel of time will quickly whirl about,
And then thy keeper 'll come and ope the door,
Put in his hand and gently take thee out.

The day arrives.
Now thro' the wire
With strong desire,
I cast my wishful eyes.
I see him come; yes, yes, 'tis he!
Hither he hastes to set me free.

Oh the music that I hear,
Sweetly warbling in my ear!
Little songster, come away,
In this vile cell no longer stay:
But take thy flight to realms above the skies.

I hear and instantly obey;
Out of my cage I spring;
And as I pass the wicker'd way,
Thus to myself I sing;
" How safe, how easy 'tis to die,
" With Christ my guardian angel by!
" He's my defence from pain and sin,
" From foes without and fears within.
" O death, where is thy sting? O grave, thy victory?'

Now I'm happy, now I'm free:
My active spirit, heav'n-born mind,
From all the dregs of sense refin'd,
Feels and enjoys her god-like dignity.
No more oppress'd with the gross atmosphere
Of error, prejudice and sin,
Freely I breathe my native air,
And drink ambrosial fragrance in.
O who can think, O who can tell,
The strange sensations now I feel!

Awhile my wings unus'd to flight, I try,
And round and round in sportive bliss I fly:
Then through the opening skies,
In rapt'rous extasy I rise,
Up to the flow'ry fields of Paradise.
And as I dart along,
On full expanded wing,
Amid the angelic throng,
Celestial anthems sing:
" Glory to him that left his throne above,
" And downward bent his way on wings of love;
" That wept, and bled, and died upon the tree,
" To conquer death and set the captives free."

HYMNS.

A Song of Praise to God.

To God the universal king,
Let all mankind their tribute bring;
All that have breath, your voices raise,
In songs of never ceasing praise.

The spacious earth on which we tread,
And wider heavens stretch'd o'er our head,
A large and solemn temple frame
To celebrate its builder's fame.

Here the bright sun, that rules the day,
As thro' the sky he makes his way,
To all the world proclaims aloud
The boundless sov'reignty of God.

When from his courts the sun retires,
And with the day his voice expires,
The moon and stars adopt the song,
And thro' the night the praise prolong.

The list'ning earth with rapture hears
Th' harmonious music of the spheres;
And all her tribes the notes repeat,
That God is wise, and good, and great.

But man, endow'd with nobler powers,
His God in nobler strains adores:
His is the gift to know the song,
As well as sing with tuneful tongue.

Mercy and Truth met together; or, the Harmony of the Divine Perfections, Psalm lxxxv. 10.

When first the God of boundless grace
Disclos'd his kind design
To rescue our apostate race
From mis'ry, shame, and sin;

Quick through the realms of light and bliss,
The joyful tidings ran;

Each heart exulted at the news,
That God would dwell with man.

Yet, 'midst their joys, they paus'd awhile;
And ask'd, with strange surprise,
But how can injur'd justice smile,
Or look with pitying eyes?

[Will the Almighty deign again
To visit yonder world;
And hither bring rebellious men,
Whence rebels once were hurl'd?

Their tears, and groans, and deep distress,
Aloud for mercy call;
But, ah! must truth and righteousness
To mercy victims fall?

So spake the friends of God and man,
Delighted, yet surpris'd;
Eager to know the wond'rous plan
That wisdom had devis'd.]

The Son of God attentive heard,
And quickly thus reply'd,
In me let mercy be rever'd,
And justice satisfy'd.

Behold! my vital blood I pour
A sacrifice to God;
Let angry justice now no more
Demand the sinner's blood.

He spake, and heaven's high arches rung
With shouts of loud applause;
He dy'd! the friendly angels sung,
Nor cease their rapturous joys.

Indwelling Sin lamented.

With tears of anguish I lament,
Here at thy feet, my God,
My passion, pride, and discontent,
And vile ingratitude.

Sure there was ne'er a heart so base,
So false as mine has been;
So faithless to its promises,
So prone to every sin!

My reason tells me thy commands
Are holy just, and true;
Tells me whate'er my God demands
Is his most righteous due.

Reason I hear, her counsels weigh,
And all her words approve;
But still I find it hard t' obey,
And harder yet to love.

How long, dear Saviour, shall I feel
These strugglings in my breast?
When wilt thou bow my stubborn will,
And give my conscience rest?

Break, sov'reign grace, O break the charm,
And set the captive free:
Reveal, Almighty God, thine arm,
And haste to rescue me.

The riches of God's word.

Let avarice, from shore to shore,
Her fav'rite God pursue;
Thy word, O Lord, we value more
Than India or Peru.

Here mines of knowledge, love, and joy,
Are open'd to our sight;
The purest gold without alloy,
And gems divinely bright.

The councils of redeeming grace,
These sacred leaves unfold;
And here, the Saviour's lovely face
Our raptur'd eyes behold.

Here, light descending from above
Directs our doubtful feet:
Here, promises of heavenly love
Our ardent wishes meet.

Our numerous griefs are here redrest,
And all our wants supply'd:
Nought we can ask to make us blest
Is in this book denied.

For these inestimable gains,
That so enrich the mind,

O may we search with eager pains,
Assur'd that we shall find!

The glorious Gospel of the blessed God, 1 Tim. i. 11.

WHAT wisdom, majesty, and grace,
Thro' all the gospel shine!
'Tis God that speaks, and we confess
The doctrine most divine.

Down from his starry throne on high,
Th' almighty Saviour comes;
Lays his bright robes of glory by,
And feeble flesh assumes.

The mighty debt that sinners ow'd
Upon the cross he pays:
Then thro' the clouds ascends to God
'Midst shouts of loftiest praise.

There he, our great High Priest, appears
Before his Father's throne;
Mingles his merits with our tears,
And pours salvation down.

Great God, with rev'rence we adore
Thy justice and thy grace:
And on thy faithfulness and power
Our firm dependance place.

It is finished, John xix. 30.

'TIS finish'd! so the Saviour cry'd,
And meekly bow'd his head, and dy'd:
'Tis finish'd—Yes, the race is run,
The battle fought, the victory won.

'Tis finish'd—all that heaven decreed,
And all the ancient prophets said,
Is now fulfill'd, as was design'd,
In me the Saviour of mankind.

'Tis finish'd—Aaron now no more
Must stain his robes with purple gore;
The sacred veil is rent in twain
And Jewish rites no more remain.

'Tis finish'd—this my dying groan
Shall sins of every kind atone:
Millions shall be redeem'd from death
By this my last expiring breath.

'Tis finish'd—Heaven is reconcil'd,
And all the powers of darkness spoil'd;
Peace, love, and happiness again
Return, and dwell with sinful men.

'Tis finish'd—let the joyful sound
Be heard through all the nations round:
'Tis finish'd—let the echo fly
Thro' heaven and hell, thro' earth and sky.

The converted thief, Luke xxiii. 42.

As on the cross the Saviour hung,
And wept, and bled, and died,
He pour'd salvation on a wretch
That languish'd at his side.

His crimes, with inward grief and shame,
The penitent confess'd;
Then turn'd his dying eyes to Christ,
And thus his pray'r address'd:

Jesus, thou Son and heir of heaven
Thou spotless Lamb of God!
I see thee bath'd in sweat and tears,
And weltering in thy blood.

Yet quickly, from these scenes of woe,
In triumph thou shalt rise,
Burst through the gloomy shades of death,
And shine above the skies.

Amid the glories of that world,
Dear Saviour, think on me,
And in the vict'ries of thy death
Let me a sharer be.

His prayer the dying Jesus hears,
And instantly replies,
To-day thy parting soul shall be
With me in Paradise.

Christians the sons of God, John i. 12. 1 John iii. 1.

Not all the nobles of the earth,
Who boast the honors of their birth,
Such real dignity can claim
As those who bear the Christian name.

To them the privilege is giv'n
To be the sons and heirs of heav'n;
Sons of the God who reigns on high,
And heirs of joys beyond the sky.

[On them, a happy chosen race,
Their Father pours his richest grace:
To them his counsels he imparts,
And stamps his image on their hearts.

Their infant cries, their tender age,
His pity and his love engage:
He clasps them in his arms, and there
Secures them with parental care.]

His will he makes them early know,
And teaches their young feet to go;
Whispers instruction to their minds,
And on their hearts his precepts binds.

When thro' temptation they rebel,
His chast'ning rod he makes them feel;
Then, with a father's tender heart,
He soothes the pain and heals the smart.

Their daily wants his hands supply,
Their steps he guards with watchful eye,
Leads them from earth to heaven above,
And crowns them with eternal love.

If I've the honour, Lord, to be
One of this num'rous family,
On me the gracious gift bestow
To call thee Abba, Father! too.

So may my conduct ever prove
My filial piety and love!
Whilst all my brethren clearly trace
Their Father's likeness in my face.

The Leper healed; or Sanctification implored, Matt. viii. 2, 3.

BEHOLD the lep'rous Jew,
Oppress'd with pain and grief,
Pouring his tears at Jesu's feet
For pity and relief.

O speak the word, he cries,
And heal me of my pain;
Lord, thou art able, if thou wilt,
To make a leper clean.

Compassion moves his heart:
He speaks the gracious word;
The leper feels his strength return,
And all his sickness cur'd.

To thee; dear Lord, I look,
Sick of a worse disease:
Sin is my painful malady,
And none can give me ease.

But thy almighty grace
Can heal my lep'rous soul:
O bathe me in thy precious blood,
And that will make me whole.

Perseverance desired.

JESUS, my Saviour and my God,
Thou hast redeem'd me with thy blood;
By ties, both natural and divine,
I am, and ever will be, thine.

But ah! should my inconstant heart,
Ere I'm aware, from the depart,
What dire reproach would fall on me
For such ingratitude to thee!

The thought I dread, the crime I hate;
The guilt, the shame, I deprecate;
And yet, so mighty are my foes,
I dare not trust my warmest vows.

Pity my frailty, dearest Lord!
Grace in the needful hour afford:
O steel this tim'rous heart of mine
With fortitude and love divine.

So shall I triumph o'er my fears,
And gather joys from all my tears:
So shall I to the world proclaim
The honours of the Christian name.

God reasoning with Men, Isaiah i. 18.

COME, sinners, saith the mighty God,
Heinous as all your crimes have been,
Lo! I descend from mine abode
To reason with the sons of men.

No clouds of darkness veil my face,
No vengeful lightnings flash around;
I come with terms of life and peace;
Where sin hath reign'd let grace abound.

Yes, Lord, we will obey thy call,
And to thy gracious sceptre bow;
Oh make our crimson sins like wool,
Our scarlet crimes as white as snow.

So shall our thankful lips repeat
Thy praises with a tuneful voice,
While, humbly prostrate at thy feet,
We wonder, tremble, and rejoice.

The Attraction of the Cross, John xii. 32.

YONDER—amazing sight!—I see
Th' Incarnate Son of God
Expiring on th' accursed tree,
And welt'ring in his blood.

Behold a purple torrent run
Down from his hands and head:
The crimson tide puts out the sun;
His groans awake the dead.

The trembling earth, the dark'ned sky,
Proclaim the truth aloud;
And, with the amaz'd Centurion, cry
This is the Son of God!

So great, so vast a sacrifice
May well my hope revive:

If God's own Son thus bleeds and dies,
The sinner sure may live.

Oh, that these cords of love divine
Might draw me, Lord, to thee!
Thou hast my heart, it shall be thine—
Thine it shall ever be!

Chief among ten thousand; or, the Excellencies of Christ,
Cant. v. 10—16.

To Christ, the Lord, let every tongue
Its noblest tribute bring:
When he's the subject of the song,
Who can refuse to sing!

Survey the beauties of his face,
And on his glories dwell;
Think of the wonders of his grace,
And all his triumphs tell.

Majestic sweetness sits enthron'd
Upon his awful brow;
His head with radiant glories crown'd,
His lips with grace o'erflow.

No mortal can with him compare,
Among the sons of men:
Fairer he is than all the fair
That fill the heavenly train.

He saw me plung'd in deep distress,
He flew to my relief;
For me he bore the shameful cross,
And carried all my grief.

[His hand a thousand blessings pours
Upon my guilty head;
His presence gilds my darkest hours,
And guards my sleeping bed.

To him I owe my life, and breath,
And all the joys I have:
He makes me triumph over death,
And saves me from the grave.]

To heav'n, the place of his abode,
He brings my weary feet;

Shows me the glories of my God,
And makes my joys complete.

Since from his bounty I receive
Such proofs of love divine,
Had I a thousand hearts to give,
Lord, they should all be thine!

The Excellency of the Priesthood of Christ.

'Mong all the priests of Jewish race,
Jesus the most illustrious stands;
The radiant beauty of his face
Superior love and awe demands.

Not Aaron or Melchizedeck
Could claim such high descent as he;
His nature and his name bespeak
His unexampled pedigree.

Descended from the eternal God,
He bears the name of his own Son;
And, dress'd in human flesh and blood,
He puts his priestly garments on.

The mitred crown, th' embroider'd vest,
With graceful dignity he wears;
And, in full splendour, on his breast
The sacred oracle appears.

So he presents his sacrifice,—
An offering most divinely sweet;
While clouds of fragrant incense rise,
And cover o'er the mercy-seat.

The Father with approving smile
Accepts the offering of his Son:
New joys the wondering angels feel,
And haste to bear the tidings down.

The welcome news their lips repeat
Gives sacred pleasure to my breast:
Henceforth, my soul, thy cause commit
To Christ, thy advocate and priest.

Sun. Psalm lxxxiv. 11.

GREAT God! amid the darksome night,
Thy glories dart upon my sight,
While, wrapt in wonder, I behold
The silver moon and stars of gold.

But, when I see the sun arise,
And pour his glories o'er the skies,
In more stupendous forms I view
Thy greatness and thy goodness too.

Thou Sun of suns, whose dazzling light
Tries and confounds an angel's sight!
How shall I glance mine eye at thee
In all thy vast immensity?

Yet I may be allow'd to trace
The distant shadows of thy face;
As, in the pale and sickly moon,
We trace the image of the sun.

In every work thy hands have made,
Thy power and wisdom are display'd;
But, Oh! what glories all divine
In my incarnate Saviour shine!

He is my Sun: beneath his wings
My soul securely sits and sings;
And there enjoys, like those above,
The balmy influence of thy love.

Oh, may the vital strength and heat,
His cheering beams communicate,
Enable me my course to run
With the same vigour as the sun!

Profession of Love to Christ.

AND have I, CHRIST, no love for thee,
No passion for thy charms?
No wish my Saviour's face to see,
And dwell within his arms?

Is there no spark of gratitude
In this cold heart of mine,
To him whose generous bosom glow'd
With friendship all divine?

Can I pronounce his charming name,
His acts of kindness tell;
And, while I dwell upon the theme,
No sweet emotion feel?

Such base ingratitude as this
What heart but must detest!
Sure CHRIST deserves the noblest place
In every human breast.

A very wretch, LORD! I should prove,
Had I no love for thee:
Rather than not my Saviour love,
O may I cease to be!

All Attainments vain without Love. 1 Cor. xiii. 1—3.

SHOULD bounteous nature kindly pour
Her richest gifts on me,
Still, O my God! I should be poor,
If void of love to thee.

Not shining wit, nor manly sense,
Could make me truly good:
Not zeal itself could recompense
The want of love to GOD.

Did I possess the gift of tongues,
But were deny'd thy grace;
My loudest words, my loftiest songs,
Would be but sounding brass.

Tho' thou should'st give me heavenly skill
Each myst'ry to explain;
If I'd no heart to do thy will,
My knowledge would be vain.

Had I so strong a faith, my God!
As mountains to remove;
No faith could do me real good,
That did not work by love.

[What though, to gratify my pride,
And make my heaven secure,
All my possessions I divide
Among the hungry poor:

What tho' my body I consign
To the devouring flame,

In hope the glorious deed will shine
In rolls of endless fame!

These splendid acts of vanity,
Tho' all the world applaud,
If destitute of charity,
Can never please my GOD.]

Oh, grant me then, this one request,
And I'll be satisfy'd,—
That love divine may rule my breast,
And all my actions guide.

Penitential Sighs.

FATHER! at thy call I come;
In thy bosom there is room
For a guilty soul to hide,—
Press'd with grief on every side.

[Here I'll make my piteous moan!—
Thou canst understand a groan:
Here my sins and sorrows tell;
What I feel thou knowest well.]

Ah! how foolish I have been
To obey the voice of sin—
To forget thy love to me,
And to break my vows to thee.

Darkness fills my trembling soul;
Floods of sorrow o'er me roll:
Pity, Father! pity me!
All my hope's alone in thee.

But, may such a wretch as I,
Self-condemn'd, and doom'd to die,—
Ever hope to be forgiven,
And be smil'd upon by heaven?

[May I round thee cling and twine,
Call myself a child of thine;
And presume to claim a part
In a tender Father's heart?]

Yes, I may! for I espy
Pity trickling from thine eye:

'Tis a Father's bowels move,—
Move with pardon and with love.

Well I do remember, too,
What his love hath deign'd to do;
How he sent a Saviour down
All my follies to atone.

Has my elder brother died?
And is justice satisfied?
Why—oh, why—should I despair
Of my Father's tender care?

The Penitent.

PROSTRATE, dear JESUS! at thy feet
A guilty rebel lies;
And upwards to thy mercy-seat
Presumes to lift his eyes.

Oh, let not justice frown me hence;
Stay, stay the vengeful storm:
Forbid it that Omnipotence
Should crush a feeble worm!

If tears of sorrow would suffice
To pay the debt I owe,
Tears should from both my weeping eyes
In ceaseless torrents flow.

But no such sacrifice I plead
To expiate my guilt;
No tears, but those which thou hast shed;—
No blood, but thou hast spilt.

Think of thy sorrows, dearest LORD!
And all my sins forgive:
Justice will well approve the word
That bids the sinner live.

Our bodies the Temples of the Holy Ghost, 1 Cor. vi. 19. 1 John v. 21.

AND will the offended GOD again
Return, and dwell with sinful men?

Will he within this bosom raise
A living temple to his praise?

The joyful news transports my breast;
All hail! I cry, thou heav'nly guest!
Lift up your heads, ye pow'rs within,
And let the King of Glory in.

Enter, with all thy heavenly train!
Here live, and here for ever reign!
Thy sceptre o'er my passions sway;
Let love command, and I'll obey.

Reason and conscience shall submit,
And pay their homage at thy feet;
To thee I'll consecrate my heart,
And bid each rival thence depart.

No idol-god shall hold a place
Within this temple of thy grace;
Dagon before the ark shall fall,
And GOD in CHRIST be all in all.

The Christian Warfare, Eph. vi. 13—17.

MY Captain sounds th' alarm of war:
Awake! the powers of hell are near!
To arms! to arms! I hear him cry,
'Tis yours to conquer or to die!

Rous'd by the animating sound,
I cast my eager eyes around;
Make haste to gird my armour on,
And bid each trembling fear begone.

Hope is my helmet; faith my shield;
Thy word, my GOD! the sword I wield;
With sacred truth my loins are girt,
And holy zeal inspires my heart.

Thus arm'd, I venture on the fight;
Resolv'd to put my foes to flight;
While JESUS kindly deigns to spread
His conqu'ring banner o'er my head.

In him I hope; in him I trust;
His bleeding cross is all my boast:
Thro' troops of foes he'll lead me on
To vict'ry, and the victor's crown.

Pride lamented.

Oft have I turn'd my eyes within,
And brought to light some latent sin;
But Pride, the vice I most detest,
Still lurks securely in my breast.

Here with a thousand arts she tries
To dress me in a fair disguise,
To make a guilty wretched worm
Put on an angel's brightest form.

She hides my follies from mine eyes,
And lifts my virtues to the skies;
And, while the specious tale she tells
Her own deformity conceals.

Rend, O my God! the veil away,
Bring forth the monster to the day;
Expose her hideous form to view,
And all her restless power subdue.

So shall Humility divine
Again possess this heart of mine;
And form a temple for my God,
Which he will make his lov'd abode.

Pleading with God under Affliction.

Why should a living man complain
Of deep distress within,
Since every sigh, and every pain,
Is but the fruit of sin?

No, Lord! I'll patiently submit,
Nor ever dare rebel;
Yet sure I may, here at thy feet,
My painful feelings tell.

Thou seest what floods of sorrow rise,
And beat upon my soul;
One trouble to another cries,
Billows on billows roll.

From fear to hope, and hope to fear,
My shipwreck'd soul is tost;
Till I am tempted in despair
To give up all for lost.

Yet thro' the stormy clouds I'll look
  Once more to thee my GOD!
O fix my feet upon a rock,
  Beyond the gaping flood.

One look of mercy from thy face
  Will set my heart at ease;
One all-commanding word of grace
  Will make the tempest cease.

The Pleasures of Social Worship.

How charming is the place,
  Where my Redeemer God
Unveils the beauties of his face,
  And sheds his love abroad!

Not the fair palaces,
  To which the great resort,
Are once to be compar'd with this,
  Where Jesus holds his court.

Here, on the mercy-seat,
  With radiant glory crown'd,
Our joyful eyes behold him sit,
  And smile on all around.

To him their prayers and cries
  Each humble soul presents:
He listens to their broken sighs,
  And grants them all their wants.

To them his sov'reign will
  He graciously imparts;
And in return accepts, with smiles,
  The tribute of their hearts.

Give me, O Lord, a place
  Within thy blest abode,
Among the children of thy grace,
  The servants of my God.

To be sung between Prayer and Sermon.

WHERE two or three, with sweet accord,
Obedient to their sov'reign Lord,

Meet to recount his acts of grace,
And offer solemn prayer and praise;

There, says the Saviour, will I be,
Amid this little company;
To them unveil my smiling face,
And shed my glories round the place.

We meet at thy command, dear Lord,
Relying on thy faithful word:
Now send thy Spirit from above,
Now fill our hearts with heavenly love.

Vanity of the world, Psalm iv. 6.

In vain the giddy world inquires,
Forgetful of their God,
'Who will supply our vast desires,
'Or shew us any good?'

Thro' the wide circuit of the earth
Their eager wishes rove,
In chase of honour, wealth, and mirth,
The phantoms of their love.

But oft these shadowy joys elude
Their most intense pursuit:
Or, if they seize the fancied good,
There's poison in the fruit.

Lord! from this world call off my love,
Set my affections right;
Bid me aspire to joys above,
And walk no more by sight.

O let the glories of thy face
Upon my bosom shine;
Assur'd of thy forgiving grace,
My joys will be divine.

Praise for Conversion, Psalm lxvi. 16.

Come, ye that fear the Lord,
And listen, while I tell

How narrowly my feet escap'd
The snares of death and hell.

The flattering joys of sense
Assail'd my foolish heart,
While Satan with malicious skill
Guided the pois'nous dart.

I fell beneath the stroke,
But fell to rise again;
My anguish rous'd me into life,
And pleasure sprung from pain.

Darkness, and shame, and grief,
Oppress'd my gloomy mind;
I look'd around me for relief,
But no relief could find.

At length to God I cry'd;
He heard my plantive sigh;
He heard, and instantly he sent
Salvation from on high.

My drooping head he rais'd;
My bleeding wounds he heal'd;
Pardon'd my sins; and, with a smile,
The gracious pardon seal'd.

O! may I ne'er forget
The mercy of my God;
Nor ever want a tongue to spread
His loudest praise abroad.

The triumphs of the Cross.

No more, dear Saviour! will I boast
Of beauty, wealth, or loud applause:
The world hath all its glories lost,
Amid the triumphs of thy cross.

In every feature of thy face,
Beauty her fairest charms displays;
Truth, wisdom, majesty, and grace,
Shine thence in sweetly-mingled rays.

Thy wealth the power of thought transcends,
'Tis vast, immense, and all divine:
Thy empire, Lord! o'er worlds extends;
The sun, the moon, the stars are thine.

Yet, (O how marvellous the sight!)
I see thee on a cross expire;
Thy Godhead veil'd in sable night;
And angels from the scene retire.

But why from these sad scenes retreat?
Why with your wings your faces hide?
He ne'er appear'd so good, so great,
As when he bow'd his head and died.

The indignation of a GOD
On him avenging justice hurl'd;
Beneath the weight he firmly stood,
And nobly sav'd a falling world.

Those triumphs of stupendous grace
Surprise, rejoice, and melt my heart:
Lord! at thy cross I stand and gaze,
Nor would I ever thence depart!

My flesh is meat indeed, John vi. 53—55.

HERE at thy table, Lord! we meet
To feed on food divine:
Thy body is the bread we eat,
Thy precious blood the wine.

He that prepares the rich repast,
Himself comes down and dies;
And then invites us thus to feast
Upon the sacrifice.

The bitter torments he endur'd
Upon the shameful cross,
For us, his welcome guests, procur'd
These heart-reviving joys.

His body torn with rudest hands
Becomes the finest bread;
And with the blessing he commands,
Our noblest hopes are fed.

His blood, that from each op'ning vein
In purple torrents ran,
Hath fill'd this cup with generous wine,
That cheers both GOD and man.

Sure there was never love so free,
Dear Saviour! so divine!

TO THE

CHURCH AND CONGREGATION,

ASSEMBLING IN

LITTLE WILD STREET,

NEAR

LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS.

My dear Friends,

As my view in discoursing of *The Divine Authority* and *Various Use* of the Holy Scriptures, is not polemical but practical, you will not expect in the following Sermons a particular investigation of these important subjects:—subjects which have been largely and ably discussed by many excellent writers. All I mean is, to bring the general ideas into a narrow compass, and to place them in a plain and easy light.

In the *three first* Sermons are stated the general grounds on which the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments are held to be divine. In the *fourth* are pointed out the uses to which they are to be applied. In the *fifth* a general view is taken of the most material objections of unbelievers. This is followed, in the *sixth*, with other deductions of a practical kind from the facts before stated and proved. And in the *two last* Sermons is shewn at large the duty which Christians owe to the Holy Scriptures.

My aim in discoursing of this subject, and throwing it into the form just described, is—to engage the serious and cordial attention of all to this Sacred Book—to impress on their minds the most awful and venerable ideas of the blessed God, with whose finger it was written, and thereby prevent their treating

it as a mere human composure—to convince them that this is the only infallible test by which every question in religion is to be tried—to represent the reasonableness and importance of preserving sacred the right of private judgment—to assist the impartial enquirer in his endeavours to come at the true meaning of Scripture—and, above all, to fix on the heart, with the blessing of God, a deep sense of the infinite utility and indispensable importance of entering into the spirit of those divine truths it reveals.

If these ends should in any degree be attained by these plain Sermons, my heart will rejoice; and I have no doubt but you, my Friends, to whose candour and affection, for a long course of years, I owe so many obligations, will cordially unite with me in praise to Him, on whose influence and grace the success of our mutual endeavours for promoting real religion and saving the immortal souls of men, entirely depends.

I am, my dear Friends,

With great Affection,

Your Servant,

in the Gospel of Christ,

SAMUEL STENNETT.

Muswell-Hill,
May 7th, 1790.

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Well thou may'st claim that heart of me,
  Which owes so much to thine.

Yes! thou shalt surely have my heart,
  My soul, my strength, my all:
With life itself I'll freely part,
  My JESUS! at thy call.

Early piety, Matt. xii. 20.

How soft the words my Saviour speaks!
How kind the promises he makes!
A bruised reed he never breaks,
Nor will he quench the smoking flax.

The humble poor he won't despise,
Nor on the contrite sinner frown:
His ear is open to their cries,
He quickly sends salvation down.

When piety in early minds,
Like tender buds, begins to shoot,
He guards the plants from threatening winds,
And ripens blossoms into fruit.

With humble souls he bears a part
In all the sorrows they endure:
Tender and gracious is his heart,
His promise is for ever sure.

He sees the struggles that prevail
Between the powers of grace and sin;
He kindly listens while they tell
The bitter pangs they feel within.

Tho' press'd with fears on every side,
They know not how the strife may end;
Yet he will soon the cause decide,
And judgment unto vict'ry send.

Divine Mercies in constant Succession, Lam. iii. 22, 23.

How various and how new
  Are thy compassions, Lord!
Each morning shall thy mercies shew,—
  Each night thy truth record.

Thy goodness, like the sun,
Dawn'd on our early days,
Ere infant reason had begun
To form our lips to praise.

Each object we beheld
Gave pleasure to our eyes;
And nature all our senses held
In bands of sweet surprise.

But pleasures more refin'd
Awaited that bless'd day,
When light arose upon our mind,
And chas'd our sins away.

How new thy mercies, then!
How sovereign, and how free!
Our souls that had been dead in sin
Were made alive to thee.

Now we expect a day
Still brighter far than this,
When death shall bear our souls away
To realms of light and bliss.

There rapt'rous scenes of joy
Shall burst upon our sight;
And every pain, and tear, and sigh,
Be drown'd in endless light.

Beneath thy balmy wing,
O Sun of Righteousness!
Our happy souls shall sit and sing
The wonders of thy grace.

Nor shall that radiant day,
So joyfully begun,
In evening shadows die away,
Beneath the setting sun.

How various and how new
Are thy compassions, LORD!
Eternity thy love shall shew,
And all thy truth record.

Children dying in their Infancy, in the Arms of Jesus, Matt. xix. 14.

THY life I read, my dearest Lord,
With transport all divine;
Thine image trace in every word,—
Thy love in every line.

Methinks I see a thousand charms
Spread o'er thy lovely face,
While infants in thy tender arms
Receive the smiling grace.

I take these little lambs, said he,
And lay them in my breast:
Protection they shall find in me,—
In me be ever blest.

Death may the bands of life unloose,
But can't dissolve my love;
Millions of infant-souls compose
The family above.

Their feeble frames my pow'r shall raise,
And mould with heavenly skill:
I'll give them tongues to sing my praise,
And hands to do my will.

His words the happy parents hear,
And shout with joys divine,
Dear SAVIOUR! all we have and are
Shall be for ever thine.

The Last Judgment.

HE comes! he comes! to judge the world,
Aloud th' archangel cries!
While thunders roll from pole to pole,
And lightnings cleave the skies.

Th' affrighted nations hear the sound,
And upward lift their eyes:
The slumb'ring tenants of the ground
In living armies rise.

Amid the shouts of numerous friends,
Of hosts divinely bright,
The Judge in solemn pomp descends,
Array'd in robes of light.

His head and hairs are white as snow,
His eyes a fiery flame,
A radiant crown adorns his brow,
And JESUS is his name.

Writ on his thigh his name appears,
And scars his vict'ries tell:
Lo—in his hand the conqu'ror bears
The keys of death and hell.

So he ascends the judgment-seat,
And at his dread command,
Myriads of creatures round his feet
In solemn silence stand.

Princes and peasants here expect
Their last, their righteous doom;
The men who dar'd his grace reject,
And they who dar'd presume.

Depart, ye sons of vice and sin,
The injur'd JESUS cries!
While the long-kindling wrath within
Flashes from both his eyes.

And now in words divinely sweet,
With rapture in his face,
Aloud his sacred lips repeat
The sentence of his grace:

Well done, my good and faithful sons,
The children of my love!
Receive the sceptres, crowns, and thrones,
Prepar'd for you above.

The promised Land.

ON Jordan's stormy banks I stand,
And cast a wishful eye
To Canaan's fair and happy land,
Where my possessions lie.

O the transporting rapt'rous scene
That rises to my sight!
Sweet fields, array'd in living green,
And rivers of delight!

There generous fruits, that never fail,
On trees immortal grow:

There rocks, and hills, and brooks, and vales,
With milk and honey flow.

All o'er those wide extended plains
Shines one eternal day;
There God the Sun for ever reigns,
And scatters night away.

No chilling winds, or pois'nous breath,
Can reach that healthful shore:
Sickness and sorrow, pain and death,
Are felt and fear'd no more.

When shall I reach that happy place,
And be for ever blest?
When shall I see my Father's face,
And in his bosom rest?

Fill'd with delight, my raptur'd soul
Can here no longer stay:
Tho' Jordan's waves around me roll,
Fearless I'd launch away.

FINIS.